ABSTRACT

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BODY TALK: AFRICAN RHYTHMIC LANGUAGE THROUGH BODY PERCUSSION

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This study examines the transmutation of rhythmic language spoken first through African drum, and later on through African bodies practicing body percussion. The use of African drums became illegal on plantations because of its communicative power during slave revolts. Africans circumvented the oppressive slave laws, by using their bodies as drums in art forms such as hambone, tap dance, church hand clapping, and foot stomping. These rhythmic language techniques have altered into scatting and beat boxing, highlighting the ingenuity of the African spirit. In any case, the aim of this thesis is to identify the parallels between the talking drum and the human body, and to recognize the ingenuity of African rhythmic language.

BODY TALK: AFRICAN RHYTHMIC LANGUAGE THROUGH BODY PERCUSSION

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

This thesis examines African Americans' ability to rhythmically communicate through body percussion, an ability which was acquired once the talking drum was prohibited by slavers. In most West African cultures, the drum is an essential element, not only of rhythm, but also of communication. Because of the drum's communicative power in slave revolts, European colonizers often forbade the use of it. Despite these efforts, the spirit of the African drum continues to live on through the performance of body percussion. Much like the talking drum, body percussion may be implemented on its own or as an accompaniment to music and/or dance.

This thesis also analyzes the process of communicating a message using body percussion methods. African body percussion proves that even when the drum is stripped away, rhythm remains as an intrinsic element in African culture. Slavery only altered African's rhythmic language since the body replaced the drum as an instrument and communication tool. Since first emerging during slavery, body percussion practices have become the foundation for many forms of African-American music. By tracing historical and contemporary body percussion practices, scholars can now examine how rhythmic language survived the perils of slavery through channeling West African drum rhythms.

In West African cultures, drum rhythms often signified different ceremonies and rituals held within a community. Ashanti healing ceremonies, The Congolese Zebola ritual, as well as many West African ethnic groups, use drum rhythms in a social context that permeates every facet of life. European colonizers witnessed the functionality and centrality of the drum in African societies both in West Africa and in the Americas. Recognizing the drum's power within the African community, European colonizers prohibited its use especially among southern plantations.

For example, talking drums, such as the djembe, mimicked vocal pitch patterns of the Mandinka language. In fact, the djembe's origin is linked to the Mandinka people of the Mali Empire. The use of the djembe to communicate made it an effective tool in warfare since its sound could be heard for miles. These drum rhythms were such a cultural staple that when this instrument was stripped away by slavers, the rhythms were embedded in the physical bodies of enslaved Africans.

Body percussion became a means of communication for enslaved Africans developed on slave ships. On these ships, enslaved Africans, translated rhythms of their respective ethnic groups using their shackled bodies as instruments.

Rhythms produced by shackles were used to identify which West African ethnic groups slaves belong to in the slave ship hulls. The use of the human body to mimic talking drum instrumentation was a means for slaves to mask rhythmic language through body percussive dances.

The chronological scope of this study ranges from pre-colonial West Africa to 1980s hip hop, when drum rhythms were the basis for rhythmic communication signaling

battle engagements, weddings, and royal processionals. These same tendencies to communicate through drums appear once slaves from various West African ethnic groups arrive in the Americas via the Middle Passage.

In addition to exploring the use of drum rhythm as communication, this thesis will also show how scat vocals derive from the drum and is itself a body percussive technique. Diasporic Africans, who dispersed throughout the world during and post-slavery applied the polyrhythmic percussive method not only in dance, but also through vocal performance; and this can be seen in jazz scat vocals. Essentially scatting is an African retention since polyrhythmic elements of the talking drum are prominently featured in this vocal percussive method.

This percussive vocal style is explored through scat legends Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, and Sarah Vaughan. Each of these jazz figures are examined for their progressive scat performance styles, which pushed the boundaries of jazz further. The last section of this study addresses the body percussive expression of beatboxing, which was prevalent throughout 1980s hip hop.

Statement of the Problem

If the historical/cultural context of African rhythmic language is ignored, then the nuances of what is considered language are lost as well. In most studies of African-American music, there is no direct link to African retention, especially with regard to rhythmic communication. Communicative body percussion is a testament to the creativity of Africans as they replaced the drum with Black bodies. Once academia investigates the connection between African drum language and Black music, the world will recognize

the extent to which rhythmic language has carried over generations since enslavement. Ultimately, it would behoove academia not to underestimate the creativity of enslaved Africans, who created an art form out of the constraints of slavery. Doing so would constitute revisionist history. The danger of perpetuating false history is magnified whenever there is a surface level understanding of cultural retention. Misinterpreting body percussion as simply a dance or nonsensical words misrepresents the legacy of indigenous African drum communication. Oversights in this area have resulted in a distorted perspective of African communication transferring messages through rhythm. African history can be retold if rhythmic communication is considered an option for scholarly investigation.

Background of the Problem

The Eurocentric approach to understanding African drum rhythms is short sighted considering its dependence on empirical evidence. To measure rhythmic language through a scientific method would dismiss the cultural relevance the language offers. Translating rhythmic expression into a spoken language would alter the meaning and ultimately the intended message from the drum. Indigenous West African ethnic groups often associate multiple meanings to linguistic and rhythmic expressions. Empirical methods generally dismiss the linguistic nuances that are present in African language. Translation of these various ethnic drum patterns would require knowledge of each West African ethnic group involved in the slave trade, along with the cultural significance of the rhythmic pattern. Many rhythmic patterns are misinterpreted if they were analyzed without proper cultural context. If one is unaware of the rhythmic messages embedded in

the field songs, hambone, or tap routine, rhythmic language cannot be nurtured and learned, as an aspect of history is lost.

Significance of the Study

African historians, educators, and music artists, via this study, will now be able to consider rhythmic language, not only a means of communication, but also as a viable source for historic information. Through investigating West African cultures that have maintained the tradition of rhythmic drum language in their communities, African historians will be able to see the parallels between various body percussion rhythms of African-American cultural expression. Exposing these links provides the opportunity to develop new rhythmic language patterns by combining body percussion methods with traditional drum rhythms.

Methodology

The purpose of following an ethnographic methodology was to focus on how African slaves developed body percussive expression from African drum language. Qualitative research approach created value from historic accounts, and books on African music and rhythm. Slave ship journals were also analyzed for instances of rhythmic communication, although these findings were rare.

Most of the writers' theory was based on enslaved Africans exposure to a rhythmic based culture prior to enslavement provided the grounds for this to develop. Aside from Olaudah Equiano there are very few slave accounts told from the African perspective. If more African sources were available (which seems unlikely) there would

be more cultural nuances preserved. Nonetheless, further research is needed to fully analyze the presence of rhythmic communication along the Middle Passage.

The writer's approach in answering the research question was to first acknowledge the roots of West African drum communication. Secondly, the writer analyzed drum use during the Middle Passage and examined similarities between drum rhythms and body percussive traits. This process also included the tracing of ethnic groups involved in the Middle Passage, what plantation slaves were sold to, and the urban areas resettled in during the great migration.

Authors such as Gwendolyn Midlo Hall provided insight in her book *Slavery and African Ethnicities* in the Americas on how different African ethnic groups were able to cultivate their traditions dependent on the location and type of plantation. This information proves useful when examining what rhythmic qualities were preserved in more lenient areas such as Louisiana. Here African rhythms were interwoven in the music of jazz. In more restrictive states such as Virginia African rhythmic expression was suppressed by plantation owners.

Therefore, the oppressive environment Virginian slaves endured may produce different results in body percussion, depending on the level of restriction. Hall's book is also a good reference for tracking which state received slaves of a certain ethnic group. This information determined which ethnic groups merged together to form the African-American ethnic makeup. Most African-American rhythmic expression is an amalgamation of several other African roots.

Research Questions

This study is designed to address the following questions:

RQ1: How did African Americans use body percussion as a rhythmic expression?

RQ2: What effects did the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade have on African drum rhythmic language?

These essential questions provide context to how body percussion eventually appeared in the cultural movements of jazz and hip hop.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

African drum rhythms were first transformed into body percussion amid the brutal atmosphere of chattel slavery. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade suppressed African cultural practices, like the use of drum rhythms, and forced slaves to employ creative methods for self-expression. Despite the horrific reality of slavery and the institution's efforts to stifle African cultural expression, African rhythms became ingrained in the fabric of American musical culture. Gospel, Jazz, and Hip Hop, for example, all body percussive elements which were adapted from the covert practices of African drumming. The purpose of this thesis is to highlight the historical transformation of African rhythmic language into communicative body percussive rhythms, as it is reflected in the aforementioned music genres.

The fields of literature included in this thesis focus on plantation life for slaves, bebop era jazz music, and beatboxing in hip hop during the early 1980s. For example, this thesis references historical slave records from British politician and author Hugh Thomas' *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870.* Additionally, this thesis references Daniel P. Mannix and Malcolm Cowley's in-depth analysis of the slave trade in their book *Black Cargoes.* Distinguished book review publication Kirkus details, "It's also startling to discover that, according to Thomas, approximately one in every ten slave ships experienced a slave rebellion—And that

a few were even successful." This realization is a crucial link to the rhythmic language used to orchestrate slave revolts.

To substantiate the claim that African drum rhythms are reflected in contemporary American music styles, this thesis refers to *Stono: Documenting an Interpreting a Southern Slave Revolt* authored by American historian Mark M. Smith. This historical text tells an explicit account on the use of drum language during slave revolts. Scientific research which explains the mechanics of beatbox vocalization in this thesis includes *Breaking Down the Beat,* a study conducted by linguists Reed Blaylock, Nimisha Patil, Timothy Greer, Shrikanth Narayanan, and beatboxer Devon Guinn.

This study links the worlds of scat and beatbox by focusing on the vocal muscles utilized with each technique. The informational foundation for the scat chapter is established with references to biographies that cover the lives of Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, and Sarah Vaughan, all of whom are discussed in that chapter. Biographies, such as jazz critic Leslie Gourse's *The Ella Fitzgerald Companion: Seven Decades of Commentary,* outline a thorough examination of Fitzgerald's career and scat vocal technique, information which is important when studying the communicative qualities prevalent in this vocal method.

Literature on slave plantation life provides for this thesis social context for contemporary American race relations during the plantation era. It is important to highlight chattel slavery, considering the restrictive parameters that eventually gave rise to various, alternative expressions of African Americans' rhythmic body percussion.

In *No Man Can Hinder Me: The Journey from Slavery to Emancipation through Song,* author and public historian Velma Maia Thomas makes an exemplary effort document early forms of body percussion, such as ring shouts common in slave communities. The insight gleaned from these sources supports this thesis's topic, in that they provide examples of rhythmic body percussion that also communicated coded messages. Unfortunately, Scholars often ignored this characteristic, along with the wealth of cultural knowledge each rhythmic pattern provides. There is an urgent need for cultural investigation in this field in order to fully grasp the intricacies of rhythmic communication and thus develop a new field that studies the linguistic quality to rhythm.

Some sources in this literature review focus on subjects, such as tap dancing, jazz, scat vocalization, and the art of beatboxing, all of which are influenced by African rhythmic expressions. This thesis seeks to prove that communicative body percussion in contemporary American music finds its roots in traditional African rhythmic expressions. Working to substantiate this claim proved difficult considering the lack of relevant resources on this topic.

A number of sources, including Ted Gioia's *The History of Jazz* and Constance Valis Hill's *Brotherhood in Rhythm: The Jazz Tap Dancing of the Nicholas Brothers*, cover jazz bebop, in which body percussive styles, such as tap dancing, were prominent. This research also highlights how bebop jazz informed different manifestations of body percussion, by providing the cultural context to preserve scat and beatboxing.

1960-1980s

The first section examines sources published between 1960 and the late 1980s. During this time period, research in African studies was limited and obscure. In spite of scarce resources, a handful of scholars provided extensive documentation on communicative African drum rhythms. One of the first books which details this transformative process is *Muntu,* written in 1961 by Janheinz Jahn, German author and influential scholar of several books on African culture. In a chapter titled *"Kuntu",* Jahn explores the modality of rhythm and highlights how the African drum was—and, in some cases, still is— a tool of communication that survived the transatlantic slave trade and has persisted over time, throughout the African diaspora. For centuries, drum telegraphy was a form of communication throughout West African regions. West African drum telegraphy utilizes drum rhythms to communicate signals and messages along a certain distance. On this point, Jahn contends,

> The Africans however did not need an alphabet to convey information; instead they developed the drum language, which is superior to writing for that purpose. It is quicker than any mounted messenger and it can convey its message to a greater number of people at one time than telegraph or telephone. Only recently has the wireless come to excel in this respect, the language of the drums. (Jahn 1961, 187)

This observation confirms the communicative power of African drums. Jahn's *Muntu* is important to thesis in that it establishes the fact that African drums served a purpose beyond mere entertainment.

The aforementioned quote hints at the transmutation of African rhythmic language from talking drum to the human body functioning as the drum. This thesis also

links the communicative body percussion elements to the African aesthetic art forms of ham boning, tap dancing, stepping, and beatboxing.

In a combined twenty-five book career, authors Daniel Mannix and Malcolm Cowley have covered a diverse assortment of topics, namely the Atlantic slave trade. Originally published in 1962, their book *Black Cargoes* details the Middle Passage experience, examines the results of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, and critiques West African leadership. Both Mannix and Malcolm Cowley are well versed on the distribution details of the slave trade, as evidenced by the extensive history both authors provide throughout this book. Writer Edward F. Sweat concurs stating, "This is an engrossing account; a clear and frightening record of man's ability to allow the lust for money to deaden his sensibilities" (Sweat 1963, 223-224). Among other topics, the authors touch on the use of Black bodies as instruments aboard the tightly packed ships of the Middle Passage, on which slaves used their shackles and adjacent wood planks to rhythmically communicate with other enslaved Africans. This creativity remained in the African community despite the harsh conditions of an oppressed life. Rhythm became a frequent tool of resistance for generations of African descendants.

This utilization of rhythm continued throughout the 1970s, when a resurgence in Black culture affected American pop culture. As Black cultural interest in African imagery increased, so did the recognition of African cultural practices, such as hambone.

African-American scholar, Paul Carter Harrison, examines African centered practices, such as the hambone along with other rhythmic traditions in the African-American community. In his seminal text *The Drama of Nommo,* Harrison focuses more

on contemporary, Black aesthetic expressions, which result from racial conflict. There is a line of demarcation Harrison creates between Black aesthetic expression versus the Eurocentric cultural standard which devalues the former. While describing Harrison's book, Ursula Barnett theorizes, "There is no room in it for the softer shades found on the five continents of the world. Only two continents remain, and both have been transplanted to the southern half of North America" (Barnett 1974, 377-378) His purpose throughout *Nommo* is to highlight nommo as a creative force that is central to Black communities. An essential aspect of nommo is rhythm, which is acknowledged only as a section of nommo rather than a primary element. Because Harrison operates from the perspective of a playwright and African-American theatre expert, his writing is sometimes and extremely hard to follow. Nonetheless, Harrison's work contextualizes how Black aesthetic expression influenced American culture, which correlates to body percussive methods found in jazz and hip hop.

In addition to Harrison's work on Black aesthetics, renowned composer Olly Wilson expertly linked African-American and West African music throughout his career in music education. Along with teaching at the University of California, Berkeley, and Conservatory of Music at Oberlin College in Ohio, Wilson also studied African music in Ghana. He's written several academic papers, including a major essay on the aesthetic of Black music, titled "The Black Perspective in Music" and published in 1974.

In this article, Wilson examines the polyrhythmic similarities between hip-hop, soul, jazz, roots reggae, and, electronica music. What Wilson explains best throughout the article is how West African polyrhythms persisted through and beyond the slave

period, the Great Migration, and the Civil Rights Era, despite the hardships African Americans faced in each period. Wilson contends that these polyrhythms were the foundation for Black music and influenced American culture.

Wilson's research provides evidence that the incorporation of physical body motion is an integral part of the music making process in West African culture. This factor is most evident in the aesthetic form of tap dancing. While the dance form stems from the Haitian tradition of "patin juba," minstrel shows corrupted the traditional relevance of tap dancing in popular culture. Minstrel shows shaped African-American music produced after 1800 serving as an example of what occurs when one culture subjugates another. This movement highlighted African-American cultural patterns, which were distinct from African cultural patterns. Wilson highlights these pivotal events throughout his article as key factors in the development of Black music.

1980s-2000

An epicenter within the African-American slave community has consistently been the Black church. *The Sanctified Church* is used to cover the manifestation of body percussion in the Black church tradition. With a masters in anthropology from Columbia Z University, Zora Neale Hurston is considered the first legitimate American folklorist by many accounts. Her 1981 book, Hurston highlights African folklore and rituals that survived in the wake of slavery and pinpoints the origin of many Black southern customs.

The revelation of this diasporic connection is *The Sanctified Church's* hidden jewel. Hurston highlights the link between the percussive clapping and stomping elements, found in the Black church, with the West African based 'ring shout' tradition.

Scholar Marion Thomas also recognizes the African characteristics Hurston studied stating, “For Hurston, the elements and style of worship in the sanctified church are more African that Christian” (Thomas 1991, 35-41). Hurston’s study is yet another source that helps this thesis analyze how the artform progressed from African drum language to an alternative form of rhythmic communication.

Organizationally, Hurston’s writing is disjointed, and, while some sections are anecdotal and depict characters with supernatural abilities, other entries are merely a list of cures and spells. Despite the abrupt transitions and rough pattern of writing, Hurston provides an accurate snapshot of Black rural life. In particular, Hurston speaks of the hand clapping and foot stomping traditions, which are prevalent in the Black church. More importantly, Hurston references the ring shout circles, which were a common religious practice on slave plantations.

As the 1980s progressed, the attention on African Studies increased significantly. More diverse scholars contributed to the discipline, providing a litany of topics related to African diasporic issues. African American Studies professor and philosopher, Molefi Kete Asante, published *The Afrocentric Idea* in 1987 and introduced an alternative method to examine African related studies. Asante is Professor and chair of African American Studies at Temple University, and author of several books, including *African Intellectual Heritage* (with Abu S. Barry, Temple) and *The Historical and Cultural Atlas of African Americans*.

In *The Afrocentric Idea,* Asante’s core idea, "The Afrocentric method," states that Africans must be viewed as subjects of the human experience and not merely on the

margins of Europe. Africans are agents and actors in their history therefore one cannot examine African life through the Eurocentric eye. Scholar Ronald Jemal Stephens believes Asante's most distinctive quality is to validate the African perspective stating, "No other contemporary African American scholar has challenged Western notions of objectivity as Asante has done in *The Afrocentric Idea*. He has exposed the weaknesses of the Eurocentric perspective by declaring that scholarship, as is practiced today, is a subjective process" (Stephens 1989, 374-377).

Using Afrocentricity as the philosophical base which places Africans in the center of their own human existence is directly relevant to the context of this thesis since it empowers Africans with the creative wherewithal to utilize body percussive expressions as communicative rhythmic tools. All of the body percussive art forms discussed in this thesis use polyrhythmic qualities which were inherited and created through the attempted erasure of the African drum.

Ultimately, these body percussive practices emerged from an oppressive slave environment hence, rhythmic communication became increasingly important for Africans to code their messages through their aesthetic skill set. This theory became most evident as many ethnic group's native languages were eradicated during the slave period. New York Times columnist, Glenn Collins, wrote and published "Re-creating Hambone, Body Music of the Past" for the New York Times on July 18, 1987. In this work, Collins highlights how percussion has been an integral element in African culture, whether through the use of instruments or through the employment of physical gestures/ movements, such as dancing, stomping, and clapping. Collins bridges the rhythmic

similarities between both Afro-Caribbean and Black Pentecostal worship, proving percussive elements of clapping and stomping are prevalent in both spaces.
The article also highlights that the rhythmic patting motion of hambone was a form of communication and had its origin in West African dance.

Dr. Kariamu Welsh-Asante is an accomplished scholar of cultural studies at Temple University. In 1994 Welsh-Asante published *The African Aesthetic: Keeper of Traditions* which explores the aesthetic commonalities that exist in African culture throughout the diaspora. This collection of essays also challenges the Eurocentric perspectives which have unfairly critiqued the Black Aesthetic. Welsh-Asante embraces the creative genius in African culture and suggests that African people analyze historical information from "a Black perspective" value system.

The transfer of African customs to African-American communities is not a new concept, and Welsh-Asante constructs the bridge between these communities through the Nzuri model structure. Kariamu Welsh-Asante created the Nzuri Model as a structured framework which displays how African aesthetic qualities can be categorized and also as a method for critiquing African derived art. Kariamu Welsh Asante's Nzuri Model lists creativity: meaning, ethos, motif, mode, function, technique, and form as principles which measure aesthetic expression.

By analyzing these African aesthetic principles, one can recognize that both the beatbox tradition in hip-hop and scat vocals in bebop era jazz share function, form, and meaning qualities. In *The Music of Black Americans,* published in 1997, Eileen Southern creates an intriguing account of Black music, which starts with the appearance of

Africans on southern plantations. Dr. Southern's vast musical knowledge stemmed from her long-standing career as an educator of music. Covering colonial era music, Revolutionary War minstrelsy, and swing era jazz, she highlights the Black instrumentalists who have progressed from field songs to hip hop.

In *The Music of Black Americans,* Southern covers each era and how they all lead or build toward the manifestation of tap. Although tap is considered a dance, it is essentially an African rooted rhythmic expression which pushes the art of body percussion forward**.** Southern highlights minstrelsy as the social catalyst for the development of tap's body percussive technique. Although this racist practice further denigrated images of Black life, minstrel theater companies often used Black dancers to accentuate the entertainment factor of their show. In a way, minstrel shows became a creative incubator for tap dancers, who were willing to be involved in theatrical propaganda. Aside from the fact that many tap dance styles were refined by Black minstrel dancers, this era still marked another example of the appropriation of Black aesthetic expression as a means to subjugate its creators.

Ted Gioia begins his book, *The History of Jazz,* with discussion of the genre's earliest roots; and he concludes his work with discussion of the genre at present. Also published in 1997, Gioia's jazz research highlights every aspect of the genre, from the breakthrough styles of jazz players to the environment in which jazz evolved. An important feature in *The History of Jazz* includes descriptions of after-hours spots, such as the Cotton Club and the Savoy, both landmark nightclubs that are pivotal locales in music history since jazz tap developed in them. Considering the story of jazz and tap are

intertwined, Gioia's work cements the legacy of hambone performers as forefathers of tap dance. His exhaustive work emphasizes how these two artforms grew together and continue the evolution of body percussion.

An important book which covers scat vocalizations is *The Birth of Bebop: A Social and Musical History,* written in 1997 by Scott Deveaux, an Associate Professor of Music at the University of Virginia. DeVeaux takes a central chapter in the history of jazz—the birth of bebop—and shows how our contemporary ideas of this uniquely American art form are based on improvisation. DeVeaux begins with an examination of the Swing Era that focuses on African-American musicians of the early 1940s, including Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Thelonious Monk. Jazz scholar reaffirms Deveaux's approach stating, "As the title suggests, his approach centers both on the substance of bebop as well as on the cultural conditions and individual and collective efforts that made its emergence possible" (Jackson 2001, 405-412). In doing so, he links issues within the jazz world to other developments on the American scene, like the turmoil during World War II and the pervasive racism of the period.

Throughout *The Birth of Be Bop*, DeVeaux places musicians within the context of their professional world, paying close attention to the challenges not only of making a living, but also of making good music. He shows that bebop was simultaneously an artistic movement, an ideological statement, and a commercial phenomenon. In how it draws from the rich oral histories that such a living tradition provides, DeVeaux's book resonates with the narratives of individual lives. While *The Birth of Bebop i*s a study in

American cultural history and a critical musical inquiry, it is also a fitting homage to bebop and to those who made it possible.

More importantly, DeVeaux gives context to the creation of scat, highlighting its early use in the careers of bebop legends, Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. Because vocalists were using vocables to mimic horn and rhythm sections, scat became synonymous with bebop as scat developed and became more closely linked to bebop, scat vocalists became linked to bebop bands. DeVeaux's purpose in *The Birth of Bebop* was to highlight the African linguistic qualities within scat vocals. Deveaux's research covers forced ethnic miscegenation, during the time of enslavement, and how the mixing of cultures affected scat vocal styles.

Dr. Michael Gomez is an expert in Africana Studies and studies the ethnic groups involved in shaping African-American culture. In his 2001 book, Michael Gomez argues that ethnic identity survived and flourished well beyond the Maafa. Ethnicity constitutes similar socio-cultural traits within a community. Before Europeans invaded Africa, West African identities were formed by the combination of centralized states, religion, language, and culture. Throughout *Exchanging*, Gomez examines the development of a formed out of an assortment of West African ethnic groups. He argues that many people mistakenly conclude that African-American identity began in the New World, but Gomez provides much evidence to the contrary and contends that ethnic mixing and the resulting African-American identity began in Africa.

This concept of ethnic mixing is a pivotal piece which explains the importance of drum percussion in African culture. A large percentage of slaves came from the Sene-

Gambian area of West Africa, a location that is a primary source for talking drums, such as the djembe and dun dun. These instruments were a major factor in developing the rhythmic language which persisted in West Africa.

In Gomez's analysis, African-American identity is largely a product of miscegenation. As mentioned by Gomez, coastal slave ports along the Western coast of African held captives from the Malinke, the Serer, Fulbe, Soninke. While at these ports, these nations mixed and created a Senegalese ethnic set. These sects of people were generally shipped from Africa to sugarcane plantations in Louisiana. While in the American south, this ethnic group created cultural artifacts, such as a distinct language, by infusing the French language with their own native speech.

2000s-Present

In 2000, author Eric Charry offered in his book *Mande Music* a detailed documentation of one of West Africa's major music cultures and ethnic groups, whom populate Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Sierra Leone. A Professor of Music at Wesleyan University Charry, bases his work on the study of ethnomusicology. His research throughout *Mande Music* comprises both written and oral sources, which is significant as a reference point because African rhythmic language often had no written translation. In his 2004 publication *Reversing Sails*, Michael A. Gomez once again focuses on numerous cultural issues of the African Diaspora. *Reversing Sails'* most noteworthy quality is its indication that African people actively responded to the hardships of slavery by preserving their culture through subversive means. In this

account, Gomez exposes the varying degrees to which African culture expressed itself throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Gomez contextualizes the social conditions for body percussion's emergence and progression, by covering a chronological scope of 18th-19th century, which both links and differentiates past and present circumstances. Gomez once again manages to detail the means by which rhythmic language was preserved throughout the African diaspora. For example, body percussion was concealed by cultural practices and ceremonies performed in Black communities.

Specifically, the hand clapping and foot stomping rhythmic dance in Black churches are an extension of the rhythmic language transformed by body percussion. Historian Marcus Rediker provides a detailed account of how the Middle Passage affected African slaves and shipmates in his 2011 book *The Slave Ship: A Human History*. In particular, Rediker highlights in chapter three the ethnic groups most involved in the capturing process: Asante, Dahomey, Oyo, Kongo, and Niger city states. Rediker argues that these militaristic nations exploited neighboring villages by capturing commoners, agriculturalists, nomads, and hunter-gatherers.

In *Tap Dancing America*, Constance Valis Hill, herself an accomplished jazz tap dancer, choreographer, and performance scholar, begins with a dramatic account of a buck dance challenge between Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and Harry Swinton at Brooklyn's Bijou Theatre. She vividly describes tap's musical styles and steps, from buck-and-wing and ragtime stepping at the turn of the century; jazz tapping to the rhythms of hot jazz, swing, and bebop in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s; to hip-hop-

inflected hitting and hoofing in heels (high and low) from the 1990s right up to today. Tap was long considered "a man's game." However, Hill's is the first historical text to highlight outstanding female dancers at the turn of the 20th century, such as Ada Overton Walker, Kitty O'Neill, and Alice Whitman; the pioneering women composers of the tap renaissance, in the 70s and 80s; and the hard-hitting rhythm-tapping women of the millennium, such as Chloe Arnold, Ayodele Casel, Michelle Dorrance, and Dormeshia Sumbry Edwards.

Written with uncanny foresight, the book features dancers who have become international touring artists, performed on Broadway, won Emmy and Tony Awards, and received the prestigious Dance Magazine, Adele and Fred Astaire, and Jacob's Pillow Dance awards. Presented with all the verve and grace of tap itself, and drawing on eyewitness accounts of early performances, as well as interviews with today's greatest tap dancers, *Tap Dancing America* fills a major gap in American dance history, placing tap firmly center stage.

Whether through historical slave records, linguistic similarities, or cultural significance, these sources support the theory that African rhythmic language has transmuted, across time and musical genre, into various body percussive forms. These body percussive practices, which were cultural survival tactics, not only maintained African rhythmic linguistic qualities, but also manifested in different artistic forms. In "*No Man Can Hinder Me: The Journey from Slavery to Emancipation through Song,* author and public historian Velma Maia Thomas makes an exemplary effort to document early forms of body percussion, such as ring shouts common in slave communities. The

insight gleaned from these sources supports this thesis's topic, in that they provide examples of rhythmic body percussion that also communicated coded messages. Unfortunately, Scholars often ignored this characteristic, along with the wealth of cultural knowledge each rhythmic pattern provides. There is an urgent need for cultural investigation in this field in order to fully grasp the intricacies of rhythmic communication and thus develop a new field that studies the linguistic quality to rhythm Some sources in this literature review focus on subjects, such as tap dancing, jazz, scat vocalization, and the art of beatboxing, all of which are influenced by African rhythmic expressions. This thesis seeks to prove that communicative body percussion in contemporary American music finds its roots in traditional African rhythmic expressions. Working to substantiate this claim proved difficult considering the lack of relevant resources on this topic.

A number of sources, including Ted Gioia's *The History of Jazz* and Constance Valis Hill's *Brotherhood in Rhythm: The Jazz Tap Dancing of the Nicholas Brothers*, cover jazz bebop, in which body percussive styles, such as tap dancing, were prominent. This research also highlights how bebop jazz informed different manifestations of body percussion, by providing the cultural context to preserve scat and beatboxing.

CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

> *For everything we danced: funerals, births, deaths, weddings, harvest, planting, initiation, war*. (Daniel Black, *The Coming*)

West African Drum Rhythms

Music has always been a vital component of African culture. Specifically, drum rhythm elements are deeply rooted in African cultures. For instance, drum rhythm language was a major communication tool used to convey the African oral history and tradition. The "talking drums" has become the voice of the language of its user.

In an in-depth article, which analyzed the use of Yoruba talking drums, entitled *Drummunication: The Trado-Indigenous Art of Communicating with Talking Drums in Yorubaland* co-author Halira Abeni Litin, defines this ability to send and receive messages as a term called drummunication:

> The term drummunication going by the semantic interpretations of its constituent parts will then refer to the process which involves the use of drums or drum beats to disseminate properly conceived ideas, appropriately coded or articulated via meaningful and comprehensible drum beats that can be decoded or understood or interpreted by the target listeners or intended audience who respond to the message of the drumbeat with the aid of appropriate, desired or expected feedback. (Halira and Babalola 2012, 1)

The drum, drummer, and audience are essential components for the process of drummunication. These roles were maintained and upheld by African societies prior to colonization. Throughout the article, both Halira Abeni Litin and Samson Olasunkanmi

Oluga outline the five stages of drummunication, which are: (1) the communicator, (2) the drumbeat message, (3) the drumbeat channel, (4) the drumbeat audience, and (5) the drumbeat's feedback.

In most cases, the "talking drum" remained a cultural staple and necessary component for communication in many African cultures. Drummunication is reflected in the lives of various ethnic groups such as: The Wolof who inhabit Senegal and Gambia and cultivated the Tama drum; the Akan from modern-day Ghana fostered the Dondo drum; and the Hausa of Northern Nigeria, established the Kalangu drum as a major part of their society. In each ethnic example, African drummers were able to encode messages into various rhythms, and audiences were able to decode drumbeat messages through cultural traditions.

> This stage of communication involves interpretation of the coded drumbeat message by the audience or listeners. The audience, who is expected to decipher the drumbeat message, may be a single person—such as the king being welcomed back to his palace from a trip by palace talking drummers. It can also be used to signify important dignitaries or eminent personalities present at an important occasion. The audience can even be supernatural beings represented by masquerades or spirits being appeased by a specific spiritual drumbeat message. Families may praise its members using a song/poem which is played by the drummunicator. (Halira and Babalola 2012, 5)

Among all African cultures, drumming permeates all facets of life. Communal events, denoting marriage ceremonies, harvest season, engagements in battle, incorporate drumming. As famed author of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* and political activist, Walter Rodney, explains, "Music and dance had key roles in "uncontaminated" African society. They were ever present at birth, initiation, marriage, death, as well as at times of recreation. Africa is the continent of drums and percussion. African people reached the

pinnacle of achievement in that sphere" (Rodney 1972, 707). As supported by Rodney's analysis, enslaved Africans replaced the talking drum with body percussive rhythms to provide a function beyond dance.

While African talking drums were utilized to convey messages over distance—body-percussion dances, namely, patin juba, were merely a continuation of these rhythmic communication methods. This rhythmic connection is ubiquitous in cultures throughout the African diaspora. The cause for this universal inclusion of the drum, is its centrality in ancient African cultures. As these cultures became global due to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, they also spread African drum influences. The communicative element in drumming was a prominent element which crossed over the Atlantic Ocean. Prior to colonization, message drums were constructed to resonate and carry messages over large distances whenever struck by heavy wooden sticks. This quality of resonance especially rings true for the djembe, which is primarily made with goat skin, the elasticity of which allows for a voluminous sound. In the case of the dundun drum, small stands which are positioned underneath it lower the drum's pitch. The hallowed walls of dundun drums would vary the tones, mimicking speech patterns and, conveying messages over large distances expanding its reach to wider groups of people. Janheinz Jahn's book, *Muntu*, explores the modality of drum rhythm in a chapter entitled "Kuntu." Here, the author highlights how the African drum was and, in some cases, still is a tool of communication:

> The Africans however did not need an alphabet to convey information; instead they developed the drum language, which is superior to writing for that purpose. It is quicker than any mounted messenger and it can convey its message to a greater number of people at one time than telegraph or telephone. Only recently

> has the wireless come to excel in this respect, the language of the drums. (Jahn 1961, 187)

Certain drum patterns alerted villages of intruders and signaled battle formations during times of conflict. Ideally, the sound from a slit gong could be heard as far as three to seven miles. This slit gong was one of the drums used in pre-colonial times to relay messages between villages. Dance historian, author, and choreographer, Constance Hill, outlined how rhythm was ingrained in the everyday lives of Africans. "In African culture, rhythm permeates all forms of expression; it is "the architecture of being, the inner dynamic that gives it form, the pure expression of the life force" (Hill 2000, 67). An example that further solidifies Hill's claim is the engrained rhythmic culture of the Fon.

The Fon are the largest ethnic group in Benin and inhabit sections of Nigeria and Togo. Ancient historical records are maintained through oral tradition. Essentially, Fon history was transmitted through folktales, chants, proverbs, and, most importantly, music. Like many West African cultures, the Fon have a concentrated focus on music as a tool of information. Although there is no codified system of drum talk, drummers emulate speech through drum sounds as a stream of syllables and vocable phrases.

The Fon ethnic group also birthed the Dahomey Empire, which supplied many slaves during the Trans-Atlantic trade during the 18th and 19th centuries, is also known for Vodun religion. A significant portion of African slaves who populated sugar plantations in the French West Indies, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and Trinidad were of the Fon ethnic group. Africans throughout the Diaspora took this portion of their knowledge and memory and blended it with other forms of the New Land culture to redefine music with African origins. Fon culture merged with French, Portuguese or

Spanish to produce distinct dance and musical styles. The Fon blended music into their lives so much that they worked to rhythms of pounding, sweeping, mud-stamping, and grinding. As a result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, many African-American descendants of the Fon were relocated in New Orleans, Louisiana. With the influx of slaves of Fon descent imported to Louisiana, it is no wonder the ceremonial polyrhythmic drums were influential in the music genre of Jazz.

The miscegenation of the Fon with slaves of the Igbo, Yoruba, Wolof and Congo nurtured an environment that was a rhythmic haven in New Orleans. The Congo Square was a cultural space where slaves were able to freely celebrate utilizing African talking drum rhythms. Additionally, Congo Square was a hub for the development of body percussive art forms, such as tap dancing.

Constance Valis Hill explores the connection between this African-American artform and the talking drums of West Africa in *Brotherhood in Rhythm: The Jazz Tap Dancing of The Nicholas Brothers,* her biography of the famous tap duo, the Nicholas Brothers. She states, "The ancient African tradition of the 'talking drum,' its rhythms "illuminating the spirit," seems to be retained in their sensuous embodiment of rhythms; their 'drum dancing' confirms the retention of a West African musical aesthetic" (Hill 2000, 6). This same rhythmic language displayed via talking drums, and is a cultural retention inherited from West African ethnic groups uprooted by the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. These talking drum rhythms transmuted into body percussive artforms despite the forced confines of slavery. Eventually, these rhythmic elements evolved into body percussive techniques such as hand claps, foot stomps, and vocal percussion. These

examples are most evident in Negro spirituals and early gospel music. Spirituals enabled slaves to convey their religious convictions, sentiments, and struggles through music. While these songs provided a spiritual escape from their disparity of slavery, there is also a distinct relation to the talking drum tradition.

Additionally, the fundamental characteristics of Yoruba (who mostly populated Louisiana) music are its polyrhythmic drumming and call-and-response music phrasing. It is not coincidental that these same elements are abundant throughout Negro spirituals and gospel music. These rhythmic features have also existed since the earliest forms of ceremonial drumming practices and extend to contemporary African music. A major component of African drumming (and dance) is polyrhythm, which is the simultaneous use of multiple rhythms in the same meter. On polyrhythm Dr. Molefi Asante explains that,

> Another aspect of African drumming was the polyrhythmic elements. African dance and African American dance reflect the polyrhythmic nature of the music. Playing several drums at once created a cross rhythm, which became the basis for an entire music piece. The polyrhythms of musicians are incorporated and expressed by African and African American folk dancers. (Welsh-Asante 1993, 187)

The "folk dancers" Welsh-Asante references have played an important role in the development of percussive communication under the form of Ring Shouts. The body percussive practices such as church hand clapping and foot stomping is a clear link to the polyrhythmic traits which appear in many West African dance traditions dance traditions. This ceremony was a practice brought over by slaves, which involved dancers moving in a counterclockwise circle praising ancestors and religious deities. As this circular motion occurred, participants provided rhythm by clapping hands and patting feet. This analysis

provides a source to the polyrhythmic traits which appear in body percussive practices such as church hand clapping and foot stomping. Both are intrinsically an extension of the communicative drum rhythms of West Africa.

Language of the Drum

At the core, African drumming functions as a language through mimicking the tonality of the African dialect. The talking drum mimics language by tactfully copying the intonations, rhythms and chant patterns of the Yoruba language. Yoruba music drums often imitate Yoruba language phrasing through the use of tonality which reveals the link to tonal and melodic words of West African Niger-Congo languages. West African cultural scholars Halira and Babalola contend this notion stating:

> It is important to point out at the juncture that while most African/Yoruba drums can be used to say one thing or the other, the "speech ability or competence" of the drums are not the same. While some have limited speech ability or competence some have unlimited speech competence. (Halira and Babalola 2012, 2)

Scientific studies conducted by author and neurologist Dr. Barry Bittman, have shown that drumming alters the way the brain processes by doubling the amount of alpha brain waves. The brain is stimulated by drumming as well as by movement through dance. This non-verbal information, processed in the lower part of the brain, integrates with the frontal lobe, which is responsible for thinking and is where language is developed. In a study conducted by Bittman and several other speech specialists entitled *The Composite Effects of Group Drumming Music Therapy on Modulation of Neuroendocrine-Immune Parameters in Normal Parameters*, the main conclusion was "Drumming is a complex composite intervention with the potential to modulate specific

neuroendocrine and neuro immune parameters in a direction opposite to that expected with the classic stress response" (Bittman et. al 2001, 7). This information is processed in the lower part of the brain that integrates with the frontal lobe, which is also responsible for linguistics.

The talking drum mimics language by, tactfully copying the intonations, rhythms, and chant patterns of the Yoruba language. Words of West African Niger-Congo languages are predominantly tonal and melodic, musical expressions that talking drums depend on. For example, the leader of a dundun ensemble is the *oniyalu,* who uses their dun drum adjustable cords to manipulate the tone and pitch, imitating tonality and vocal inflections in Yoruba language. This process is a clear example of how drummunication relays a specific message for listeners. Oluga and Babalola elaborate on this notion:

> The drummunicator who uses the dundun drum to communicate or the one who uses the bata to communicate (i.e. the aludundun or alubata) can initiate the idea of welcoming some people to a given occasion or ceremony, passing vital messages to those in the neighborhood, greeting the king who is just coming from his bedroom, reciting the oriki of important people or places or reminding subjects of the supremacy of the monarch within a kingdom. (Halira and Babalola 2012, 4)

More specifically, Yoruba talking drums are an important source of history, primarily as an alternative means of oral history. Ultimately, a rhythmic language was cultivated from a people adept in both verbal and non-verbal languages. Talking drums were also used in religious practices, as well as in storytelling and dance. As African slave populations increased among the Caribbean Islands, many of these percussive traditions persisted in a transmuted state.

These rhythmic concepts persisted through the traumatic cultural shift ushered by the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Though slavery disrupted the centrality of the talking drum, the most significant change was the application of the instrument.

Middle Passage

> *Someone would beat his planks like a drum and say his own name three times. That was the sign. Then the rest of us would join in, beating our planks with our fists and speaking our mass in succession.* (Daniel Black, *The Coming*)

Early slave ship artifacts show that the Akan drum was stationed on many voyages, since it was the main instrument used for coercive means. In some instances, slave captains requested and hired native West African drummers for the Trans-Atlantic. This occupation perverted the African drum rhythmic language into an oppressive tool. Once used as an apparatus of communication, the talking drum became an instrument serving an oppressive cause; a tradition which continued with Africans throughout North America and the Caribbean during the slave trade. For instance, djembes were utilized to keep African's healthy through regimented dance breaks.

These daily slave dancing routines contributed to the framework of African-based expressive culture in the New World. Despite removing the communicative power of the talking drum, African rooted singing, drum rhythms, and dancing reappeared on slave ships as body percussion. Author Constance Hill elaborates on this circumstance further by explaining, "Because West Africans lacked a common spoken language, music and dance served a crucial role as a medium for conveying the history and values of these people who were captured and brought to the New World" (Hill 2000, 6). Author Daniel Black narrates the middle passage experience in first person form in the novel *The*

Coming. Black tells the story from the second-person perspective following a collective of various African ethnic groups through the point of capture to the auction block. Black also illustrates how the drum was utilized during the enslavement process. "Some were beating drums to warn others. Most were not listening. When the drums fell silent, it was too late. Our destruction was complete" (Black 2014, 22). Though this passage is fictional, it accurately details the rhythmic methods Africans used to survive trans-Atlantic slave trade. Prior to colonization, this complex African communication system transformed djembe and dundun drum patterns into telegraphy tools for the Fon, Yoruba, and Ibo.

In essence, the Middle Passage was merely a catalyst for African body percussion. During this historical period, body percussion was Africans communicative response to the tight packing methods of rapacious slavers. In order to maximize profit, slave captains often abused the ability to transport a high quantity of Black bodies across the Atlantic. In order to achieve this task, slaves were kept in overcrowded holding quarters for a three-month journey. In *Black Cargoes*, Daniel Mannix and Malcolm Cowley detail the Middle Passage experience explaining, "The tight-packers answered that although the loss of life might be greater on each of their voyages, so too were the net receipts from a larger cargo" (Maddix/Cowley 1977, 106). To quell the horrors of disease, starvation, and unsanitary conditions slaves hummed, moaned, and tapped their emotional pain away giving birth to vocal and body percussion. Essentially, African captives used the rhythm ingrained in their spirit to survive.

Traumatized by the extreme conditions they were suddenly exposed to, Africans survived through body percussive rhythms. The rhythmic commonalities among most West African ethnic groups provided a foundation for communication to occur. Ceremonial poly-rhythms were a communication tool for enslaved Africans of different ethnicities. Subsequently, a collective group of slaves formed a cacophonous wall of sound when their vocal and body percussive rhythms. Ship captains often encouraged slaves to drum in hope that it would keep morale as high as possible, nonetheless in the hulls of ships named Hope, Justice and Jesus of Lübeck, Africans created songs which allowed them to communicate with each other. Africans achieved this feat by transmuting the talking drums rhythm language to the physical body. For example, the rhythmic patterns created by the rattling of shackles kept slaves aware of who remained alive among the harsh slave ship conditions. The tonal attributes of the talking drum diminished, however the rhythmic sensibilities delivered coded messages.

As Black bodies moved across the Atlantic Ocean, rhythmic messaging became necessary for enslaved Africans survival. This notion was especially true if a significant number of slaves belonged to the same ethnic group, mutinies could be signaled by a familiar drum rhythm. African captives ingeniously created a communication system quite different than the European language framework by using their environment to form collective rhythms. The hollow design of slave ships allowed enslaved Africans to use their voices, bodies, and ships as percussive instruments.

African captives, despite their enforced conditions, utilized body percussive practices reproduced the complex rhythms of African drumming. As enslaved

communities were established, ethnic groups merged rhythms transcended language barriers. Once enslaved Africans arrived in the Americas, chain rattling was replaced with hand clapping and tapping feet in polyrhythmic cadences.

Slavers discovered that dancing prevented muscle atrophy, which was a common ailment among slaves. Besides physical ailments such as dysentery, fever, and smallpox, a condition known as fixed melancholy also plagued ships. To prevent these illnesses, slaves were often brought upon decks in a process known as *dancing the slaves*. This procedure involved a slave drummer playing rhythms for African captives while slavers coerced to dance. As Ron Segal details in *The Black Diaspora*, "Exercise came to be recognized as essential to the health of the slave, and this took the form of what was called dancing. Dancing, however, had little to do with it" (Segal 1995, 34). On slave ships, dancing became a commodified act preserving the African body for profit. In spite of the harsh conditions, Africans used ethnic culture as a survival tool.

Dancing was long considered a remedy against cases of fixed melancholy among slaves. This disorder caused emotional distress so severe that the afflicted often refused to eat and willed themselves to death. Slaves also voluntarily jumped overboard toward ravenous sharks, using suicide as a form of resistance. Ron Segal mentions this phenomenon in *Black Diaspora*. He states, "They fell into a "fixed melancholy" which might in some cases have been the result of nutritional deficiencies but in others seemingly dying by effort of will. The very sight of their destination apparently produced a rise in suicides" (Segal 1995, 35). With fixed melancholy becoming a common ailment on slave ships, dancing served the important purpose of revitalizing both the physical and

spiritual self. A passage from Mannix's Black Cargoes describes the process extensively: "Dancing was prescribed as a therapeutic measure, a specific against suicidal melancholy, and also against scurvy-although in the latter case it was a useless torture for men with swollen limbs" (Mannix/Cowley 1977, 114). As a result of those enforced rituals, dancing to drums became a negative experience associated with slavery. When the African drum rhythm transformed from a communicative instrument into a tool of enslavement, body percussion filled the communicative void the talking drum left open once its use was perverted.

Undoubtedly, slavery altered Africans relationship with the talking drum as ceremonial dances such as Sorsonet became survival tools in captivity. Repeatedly, this meaning became drastically bastardized aboard slave ship decks. The context for this ritualistic song completely changed from celebration to subjugation. Songs like Sorsonet were fragmented because of the confined environment for all passengers aboard ships. Due to the restrained nature of tight packing, free body movement of captives significantly decreased, which subsequently caused dance, drum, and body percussive rhythms to become quick and staccato.

Certainly, drum rhythms remained a central factor for survival in the harsh setting of the Middle Passage, but it also pushed slaves to use any object available for percussive sound. Quite often the object was their own bodies and voices. Because music and dance are central elements in African life, slaves continued to express their trauma through song while makeshift instruments provided a rhythmic backdrop. Mannix explains, "Music was provided by a slave thumping on a broken drum or an upturned kettle, or by an

African banjo, if there was one aboard, or perhaps by a sailor with a bagpipe or a fiddle" (Mannix/Cowley 1977, 114). Quite often, slaves would take advantage of their imprisoned state, using the rattling of shackles to create a rhythmic language. Dancing in chains added extra percussion to drum rhythms played on slave ships. When slaves were brought on deck to dance, they were often shackled together restricting wide dance moves into small rhythmic steps. Since many ethnicities shared certain ceremonial practices, war drum rhythms often unified slaves for potential mutinies. Considering the talking drums oppressive role, the African body became the conduit of rhythm. These metal restraints provided an alternative source of rhythm. Resonance created from slave's shackled limbs, supplied a rhythmic foundation to communicate among each other. The resulting makeshift rhythm conveyed the intense emotion of living in captivity. Author Daniel Black documents this process well in his novel *The Coming*: "With anxious energy, we began to create rhythms with our fists and feet. All of us. On one accord. Together. One person would introduce a beat, and the rest of us would add our complimentary thump until the entire lower portion of the ship shook" (Black 2015, 43).

The Middle Passage did not diminish the rhythmic expression of Africans in captivity; it merely changed how African rhythm manifested. Daniel Black's passage along with many historical accounts clearly identifies how slavery transmuted African bodies into musical instruments. This body percussive practice developed further once African slaves formed communities in the Americas. Scholar Kariamu Welsh-Asante explains how the Trans-Atlantic slave trade enforced cultural exchange. Asante outlines, "The Atlantic Ocean was a prime location for cultural exchange between the American,

African, and European continent. The trans-Atlantic slave trade required cultures to blend in extreme circumstances" (Welsh-Asante 1993, 188). Ethnicity differences began to blur as a result of the interbreeding of slaves. Once a slave arrived at the plantation, African ethnicity was erased and created a new identity based on location, such as slaves from the Congo became Brazilian. In spite of displacement, African rhythms remained a cultural priority.

The homogenized African ethnic groups throughout the diaspora masked their rhythms with Eurocentric aspects to avoid persecution. Acculturation was inevitable since slavery forced groups of people into close proximity with one another. This process was necessary for Africans populating both South and North America, as well as the Caribbean. For example, the Congolese intermixed African religions with Christianity due to strained resources in Africa and the Americas. This method was also true in relation to new rhythms, which were extensions of traditional homeland religions.

For generations after the first slaves arrived in North America, Africans followed religious practices from their homeland. Ibo, Yoruba, and Fon ethnic groups heavily populated several southern states: Louisiana, North and South Carolina, Alabama, and Virginia. Drum rhythms continued to play a large role in the traditions of each ethnic group's descendants. Vodun, for example, traveled over with Yoruba captives from modern day Benin, was heavily practiced by Louisiana slaves. During the 18th century, religious drum rhythms were used daily at Congo Square, widely known as the birthplace of Jazz. Congo Square was an amalgamation of musical influences which ranged from

marching band music, classical, ragtime, and traditional African music. Not only did African ethnicities merge drum rhythms, African music merged with various genres as well. Welsh-Asante elaborates: "Although, European culture was forced upon enslaved Africans, they were able to maintain some religious beliefs and practices. This fusion of music, art, and literature eventually created African-American culture" (Welsh-Asante 1993, 188).

Plantation Life

> *The call of the drum, the rhythm of the dance, the charm and soothing of the songs were the same in America as in Africa. It was this music that sustained Middle Passage. 'Someone would beat his planks like a drum and say his own name three times. That was the sign. Then the rest of us would join in, beating our planks with our fists and speaking our mass in succession.*' (Daniel Black, *The Coming*)

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might in some cases have been the result of nutritional deficiencies but in others seemingly dying by effort of will. The very sight of their destination apparently produced a rise in suicides" (Segal 1995, 35). With fixed melancholy becoming a common ailment on slave ships, dancing served the important purpose of revitalizing both the physical and spiritual self. In a passage from Mannix's Black Cargoes describes the process extensively, "Dancing was prescribed as a therapeutic measure, a specific against suicidal melancholy, and also against scurvy-although in the latter case it was a useless torture for men with swollen limbs. (Mannix/Cowley 1977, 114). As a result of those enforced ritual, dancing to drums became a negative experience associated with slavery. When the African drum rhythm transformed from a communicative instrument into a tool of enslavement, body percussion filled the communicative void the talking drum left open once its use was perverted.

Undoubtedly, slavery altered Africans relationship with the talking drum as ceremonial dances such as Sorsonet became survival tools in captivity. Repeatedly, this meaning became drastically bastardized aboard slave ship decks. The context for this ritualistic song completely changed from celebration to subjugation. Songs like Sorsonet were fragmented because of the confined environment for all passengers aboard ships. Due to the restrained nature of tight packing, free body movement of captives significantly decreased, which subsequently caused dance, drum, and body percussive rhythms to become quick and staccato.

Certainly, drum rhythms remained a central factor for survival in the harsh setting of the Middle Passage, but it also pushed slaves to use any object available for percussive

sound. Quite often the object was their own bodies and voices. Because music and dance are central elements in African life, slaves continued to express their trauma through song while makeshift instruments provided a rhythmic backdrop. Mannix explains, "Music was provided by a slave thumping on a broken drum or an upturned kettle, or by an African banjo, if there was one aboard, or perhaps by a sailor with a bagpipe or a fiddle" (Mannix/Cowley 1977, 114). Quite often, slaves would take advantage of their imprisoned state, using the rattling of shackles to create a rhythmic language. Dancing in chains added extra percussion to drum rhythms played on slave ships. When slaves were brought on deck to dance, they were often shackled together restricting wide dance moves into small rhythmic steps. Since many ethnicities shared certain ceremonial practices, war drum rhythms often unified slaves for potential mutinies. Considering the talking drums oppressive role, the African body became the conduit of rhythm. These metal restraints provided an alternative source of rhythm. Resonance created from slave's shackled limbs, supplied a rhythmic foundation to communicate among each other. The resulting makeshift rhythm conveyed the intense emotion of living in captivity. Author Daniel Black documents this process well in his novel *The Coming*: "With anxious energy, we began to create rhythms with our fists and feet. All of us. On one accord. Together. One person would introduce a beat, and the rest of us would add our complimentary thump until the entire lower portion of the ship shook" (Black 2015, 43).

The Middle Passage did not diminish the rhythmic expression of Africans in captivity; it merely changed how African rhythm manifested. Daniel Black's passage along with many historical accounts clearly identifies how slavery transmuted African

bodies into musical instruments. This body percussive practice developed further once African slaves formed communities in the Americas. Scholar Kariamu Welsh-Asante explains how the Trans-Atlantic slave trade enforced cultural exchange. Asante outlines, "The Atlantic Ocean was a prime location for cultural exchange between the American, African, and European continent. The trans-Atlantic slave trade required cultures to blend in extreme circumstances" (Welsh-Asante 1993, 188). Ethnicity differences began to blur as a result of the interbreeding of slaves. Once a slave arrived at the plantation, African ethnicity was erased and created a new identity based on location, such as slaves from the Congo became Brazilian. In spite of displacement African rhythms remained a cultural priority.

The homogenized African ethnic groups throughout the diaspora masked their rhythms with Eurocentric aspects to avoid persecution. Acculturation was inevitable since slavery forced groups of people into close proximity with one another. This process was necessary for Africans populating both South and North America, as well as the Caribbean. For example, the Congolese intermixed African religions with Christianity due to strained resources in Africa and the Americas. This method was also true in relation to new rhythms, which were extensions of traditional homeland religions.

For generations after the first slaves arrived in North America, Africans followed religious practices from their homeland. Ibo, Yoruba, and Fon ethnic groups heavily populated several southern states: Louisiana, North and South Carolina, Alabama, and Virginia. Drum rhythms continued to play a large role in the traditions of each ethnic group's descendants. Vodun, for example, traveled over with Yoruba captives from

modern day Benin, was heavily practiced by Louisiana slaves. During the 18th century, religious drum rhythms were used daily at Congo Square, widely known as the birthplace of Jazz. Congo Square was an amalgamation of musical influences which ranged from marching band music, classical, ragtime, and traditional African music. Not only did African ethnicities merge drum rhythms, African music merged with various genres as well. Welsh-Asante elaborates: "Although, European culture was forced upon enslaved Africans, they were able to maintain some religious beliefs and practices. This fusion of music, art, and literature eventually created African-American culture" (Welsh-Asante 1993, 188).

Plantation Life

> *The call of the drum, the rhythm of the dance, the charm and soothing of the songs were the same in America as in Africa. It was this music that sustained, encouraged, and empowered them. It was this music that took them home, home to Africa where rituals, power, joy, and life began.* (Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870*)

Plantation life was a transitional period for slaves, which severely diminished the opportunity for dance. African drumming remained prevalent in all aspects of slaves' daily lives, work, and entertainment; however, drumming grew to include salvaged spare parts used as percussion instruments. Hill uses expert analysis to reveal aspects unknown to many. She says:

> Music, in particular, was among the African cultural traditions that were most readily maintained under slavery. The most important musical instrument was a drum, and a variety of other percussion instruments. Such as bells, castanets, gongs, and rattles, also figured prominently. These allowed for participatory performance practices that relied on communal creation and provided the means for slaves to accommodate to the dominant culture without being completely absorbed into it. (Hill 2000, 5)

Many African rituals related to the drum were altered to function within the social confines of the plantation. One of these percussive based customs was the ring shout. Initially, in the antebellum American South, slaves were allowed to gather for ring shout celebrations, in which participants move in a circle while stomping their feet and clapping their hands in rhythm. Constance Hill highlights the importance of this circle formation stating, "As African men and women formed a sacred circle in their rituals, so too did they in the ring shouts on plantations. Only the language was different; the feelings, the power, and emotion were the same" (Hill 2000, 3). Participants would enter ecstatic trances during midnight ring shout gatherings. The main elements of these rituals always included syncopated body percussion such as hand clapping and foot stomping. Ring shout participants took advantage of their environment, just as enslaved Africans utilized the floorboards and shackles to produce a rhythmic pattern.

Ring shout singers begin by harmonizing melody, while timekeepers would use heavy staff to pound a steady beat, as supporters would clap a faster rhythm, intensifying the energy. The tempo might increase as the fervor intensified, peaked, and finally subsided. According to slaves and their descendants, shouts could last from night until the morning hours. The folklore explored in Zora Neale Hurston's *Sanctified Church* describes ring shouts as an African tradition which survived slavery. The author contends, "There can be little doubt that shouting is a survival of the African "possession" by the gods. In Africa it is sacred to the priesthood or acolytes, in America it has been generalized" (Hurston 1981, 60). Hurston suggests that the ritualistic use of body percussion in the Black church is an example of transforming the African body into

the drum. Different rhythms of any number can create a wave of sound. As author Daniel Black contends, “It was the language of our gods, the collective voice of a people. The drum’s polyrhythmic repertoire surpassed the numbers on our heads” (Black 2015, 48). Traditionally, African ceremonies are where polyrhythms are mostly played, where varied cadences enhanced the communal experience of church.

The transition from traditional drumming to body percussion rhythms was also a result of prohibiting drum use on plantations. This act was a blatant effort from plantation owners, to discontinue the drum’s utility as a tool in slave rebellions. During the infamous slave uprising known as the Stono Rebellion of 1739, Angolan slaves communicated with each other through drum rhythms. Angolan ethnic groups such as the Bakongo are known for using drums to signal battle. Drum telegraphy helped slaves identify when to strike key persons and locations without detection from whites. Ultimately, this event led to the deaths of over thirty white citizens. Gomez details this experience in *Reversing Sails*.

> One of the more striking examples was the prior Stono Rebellion of 1739, when a contingent took up arms twenty miles west of Charleston, South Carolina and marched through the countryside wreaking havoc. South Carolina at this time had a Black population of some 39,000 compared to 20,000 whites, 70 percent who were from West Central Africa. (Gomez 2004, 315)

The revolt was so brutal for white slave owners that African drumming was outlawed throughout the South. This act was considered a necessary precaution for white plantation owners. Prohibiting the use of drums also altered the rhythmic expression of African-American music.

While these incidents were often attributed to cruel slave treatment, they also reveal a true depiction of how powerful African rhythm is. The drum proved to be a formidable weapon during the plantation period. Efforts such as these inspired hope for slaves despite their vulnerable state of their safety. This distinctive reality confronts how powerful Black music is. African rhythm became an effective form of self-expression designed to fight oppression and convey the intense feelings of Black people. Slavery reshaped the drum's aesthetic value. These observations expose the reasons slaves had to cultivate alternative methods for drumming.

As a result of this punitive restriction, Africans substituted the drum with their bodies. In the desperation of slavery, every available body part became a tool. Historian Hugh Thomas provides an extensive account from former Igbo slave Olaudah Equiano in regards to Whites reactions to the drum stating, "Whites were always wary when my people got together. The singing, the beating of the drums seemed to bring the enslaved to a religious frenzy, giving them ideas of Africa and power and freedom" (Thomas 1997, 6). African slaves' innovation was fueled by the struggle to survive. This body percussive creativity served as inspiration in African-American music is implemented across the music genres of blues, gospel, jazz, and hip hop. Gilroy elaborates:

> The power of music in developing Black struggles by communicating information, organizing consciousness, and testing out or deploying the forms of subjectivity which are required by political agency, whether individual or collective, defensive or transformational, demands attention to both the formal attributes of this expressive culture and its distinctive moral basis. (Gilroy 1993, 36)

African slaves had successfully preserved their homeland culture by adapting to the oppressive environment. This achievement was no small feat, considering the oppositional forces slaves faced. Prior to colonization, polyrhythm was cultivated as a functional tool African music structure; however, this tool became more emotive than communicative on the plantation. Music historian Frank Tirro explains, "The slave's dance was often a test of physical endurance, a way of earning respect, and a channel through which he could express his inner feelings. In this manner, the slave sought relief from the tensions of plantation life" (Tirro 1977, 46). Despite drumming restrictions, African slaves purged the pains of slavery in a foreign western land. These characteristics were revealed in the dance, music, and art of African Americans, which eventually influenced America. Velma Maia Thomas details this experience in *No Man Can Hinder Me*, her account of plantation life. "With hand clapping, leg slapping, and polyrhythms, slave children made their play songs truly African. The best performers could combine song with clapping, allowing them to keep the beat" (Thomas 1997, 24). Author and historian Hugh Thomas also explained the preventive measures slave owners took to suppress drum communication in his comprehensive study on slavery entitled *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440-1870*. "From 1619 through 1788, the laws prohibiting African music and customs became increasingly stringent. An attempt to suppress African dancing was made on the island of Martinique in 1634, but the records show that these measures seem to have met with little effect" (Thomas 1997, 98).

Throughout the slave era, Blacks also replicated drums by using miscellaneous work items as instruments. Various labor duties provided a polyrhythmic foundation for

vocal chants and was used in digging ditches, hammering railroad spikes, or chopping wood. Whether these percussive elements were created with a hand clap or fall of the hammer, this technique was an extension of the African polyrhythmic heritage. However, the clearest form of body percussion comes from the Congolese dance tradition called Patin Juba.

The Patin Juba tradition was cultivated by Congolese slaves in Haiti. The dance movements involve slapping hands on thighs, chest, and finger snapping as ways to create various percussive rhythms. Because of limited access to musical instruments, traditions similar to the hambone flourished wherever slavery existed. The polyrhythmic patterns that enslaved African performers created were rooted in the drum language of the "talking drum." Tirro explains the natural progression of body percussion stating, "If words can be transmitted through the drums, they can also be transmitted through the body, with an equation of music and dance or drums and dance, body motions can be specifically expressive" (Tirro 1977, 35). Juba evolved as slaves were shipped to plantations across the Americas. In Brazil, the tradition became "bate coxa" (meaning literally "slap thigh"), while in America it translated to "hambone." The name "hambone" refers to the communal practices of early slave communities.

Slave families conserved their food under adverse conditions by consuming discarded food scraps of plantation owners. The bone of ham was used for soup repeatedly in different pots as a way of survival. This technique was a progression from body percussion on slave ships. This particular tradition is an explicit use of improvisation in the struggle of survival.

Hambone is a natural progression of Africans using the physical body as a means to rhythmically communicate. Instead of using external instruments such as drums and chains, Africans would slap their own legs and arms to form rhythmic patterns. Ham Boning became popular during slave celebrations accompanying makeshift instruments such as the washboard, banjo and harmonica. In many ways, the Ham Boning dance filled the void left by the drum's absence. Tirro contends, "In most areas of the South, specific legislation outlawed drumming but the Black substituted hand clapping and foot stomping in their own private gatherings. Thus, the African rhythms could be practiced and perpetuated without offending their white masters" (Tirro 1997, 47). Despite being outlawed, the drum took on a new form within the African body. Because slavery stripped away external instruments familiar to Africans, it became necessary for slaves to internalize percussion. This assimilation provided an alternative trajectory for African music traditions.

The person credited for this art form's creation was a Black man named William Henry Lane also known as the "Master Juba." English novelist Charles Dickens wrote about Lane in *American Notes*. Describing a dancer by the name of Master Juba, he wrote:

> And in what walk of life, or dance of life, does man ever get such stimulating applause as thunders about him, when, having danced his partner off her feet, and himself too, he finishes by leaping gloriously on the bar-counter, and calling for something to drink, with the chuckle of a million of counterfeit Jim Crows, in one inimitable sound! (Dickens 36)

Lane combined patin juba body percussion techniques with dances he had learned from poor Irish immigrants. Many of the ethnic dance moves he had learned and developed,

such as the shuffle, slide, buck-dancing, pigeon wing, and clog became what is now known as tap dancing. Elements of the Irish jig mixed with the ham bone dance to form a new style of dance birthed from minstrelsy.

Hambone was first known as Juba dance to American and Caribbean plantations. The Juba dance—originally known as *Patin' Juba*—is a Haitian/Congolese style of dance. The movements involve stomping, slapping, patting the arms, legs, chest, and cheeks in order to produce percussive polyrhythms. Slaves often performed the dance during public gatherings once rhythmic instruments became prohibited. Although African-American slave communities were restricted in how they expressed themselves, ham boning provided an outlet which connected them to their African origins.

Author of *The African Aesthetic* Kariamu Welsh Asante contends, "The environment of slavery is also an important factor in considering, the openness of Africans to European musical traditions, if only in terms of the degree of receptiveness" (Welsh-Asante 1993, 145). The term hambone comes from a communal culinary practice prevalent in Black slave communities. Slaves often had to repurpose the scraps and leftovers of slave owners. The hambone was highly prized for the flavor it retained. Resourceful families salvaged the ham bone as a source of flavor adding it to soup dishes for seasoning qualities. Once a family finished their use of the ham bone, it was given to another Black family in the same community. In a comparative look between folklore and the actual dance, hambone has been passed from generation to generation. Hambone allowed cultural, sacred, and historic rhythms to survive and evolve. The hambone without its meat still offers sustenance much like the African. The role ham boning

removes the necessity of the drum, by placing more focus on individual rhythm. This approach to musical expression is distinctly different from Eurocentric cultures. Asante explains,

> Music is unquestionably an important bearer of tradition in African American culture, as the roots and practices which are found within this tradition are ongoing reminders of the ancestral home of its makers and form an important link for African Americans in the United States with those of like descent who reside in other parts of the African diaspora. (Welsh-Asante 1993, 143)

Out of necessity, this dance became a percussive substitute for the drum. The juba dance functioned both as an instrument and celebratory ritual. However, this transformation marginalized the communicative power of the djembe, djun-djun, conga and a bata drum. Certain initiations became lost in the transition from drum to body percussion. Harrison contends further stating, “It is the drum that gives Black people a special orientation to sounds, as opposed to simply words, thereby causing the uninitiated ear to perceive mispronunciations in speech” (Harrison 1972, 37). Reinvention is an endearing quality which added value to Black culture. The spirit of the drum remained intact since African slaves possessed an innate ability to manipulate rhythm.

CHAPTER IV

TAP: FOOTSTEPS IN THE PATH OF RHYTHM

> *The major things Black art has to have are these: it must have the ability to use found objects, the appearance of using found things, and it must look effortless. It must look cool and easy. If it makes you sweat, you haven't done the work. You shouldn't be able to see the seams and stitches*. (Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*)

In order to appreciate tap dance fully, one must examine the importance of the circle in African culture. The circle structure is the apex of African aesthetics and is central to understanding both hambone and tap dance. On plantations, slaves routinely gathered in dance circles for communal performances. This ritual prioritized the freedom to move which, in an oppressive slave environment, is a quintessential act of agency and rebellion.

The significance of the circle is the idea that there is no beginning or end, no generic notions of hierarchy. Both performer and audience coexist in the center of the circle. In African drum/dance circles, spectators are encouraged to participate through dance merging the worlds between performer and observer.

Throughout slavery, communal dance circles allowed practitioners to learn rhythmic techniques from each other, considering most dance movements were improvised. Mastery of early percussive dances such as the hambone required visual and audio mimicry, which is an integral cultural concept that governs African aesthetics. This

act involves the conscious, intentional imitation of something or someone. Author, scholar, and choreographer Constance Hill states in, *Tap Dancing America,* that "Technique is transmitted visually, aurally, and corporeally, in a rhythmic exchange between dancers and musicians. Mimicry is necessary for the mastery of form. The dynamic and synergistic process of copying the other to invent something new is most important to tap's development" (Hill 2009, 3).

Here Hill highlights how communal experience provided a space where mimicry could occur, and intractable percussion patterns were able to survive the traumatic experience of slavery. Historically, Africans simulating musical instruments –especially the drum—through body percussion helped retain elements of their pre-colonized culture. African slave's intuitive circular formations unknowingly fostered an artform allowing hambone performers to inherit techniques from each other. This collective practice ultimately kept the African rhythmic tradition alive in harrowing times aiding in the evolution of tap. Author Kariamu Welsh-Asante describes in *The African Aesthetic* how adding song and dance to daily life was already a cemented institution and reinforced African traditions: "Functionality is normative in traditional African aesthetics and contemporary African and African-American aesthetics tend to involve some aspect of functionality" (Welsh-Asante 1993, 2). Essentially, dance maintained its functionally in slave communities despite the forlorn circumstances of plantation life.

Amidst the carnage of numerous slave revolts, plantation owners were forced to recognize the unifying power of African drums. During the 19th century many colonies prohibited use of the drum on plantations because of its communicative power in slave

revolts. To circumvent further uprisings, plantation owners outlawed African drums which eradicated cultural concepts—such as drum circles—which once governed African communities. Unintentionally, slave owners provided opportunity for African slaves to develop dance moves into a refined art form. African slaves began to create rhythms by using wash tubs, buckets, and other offhand instruments.

The combination of makeshift instruments and polyrhythmic beat patterns constructed the rhythmic elements of communal African ritual and transformed field slave work songs into music art forms. In extreme cases, slaves used their own bodies when devoid of any instruments continuing the spirit of the African drum. African Studies professor and author of *The Afrocentric Idea*, Dr. Molefi Kete Asante contends that,

> The fact that Africans were prohibited from using the drums during the Enslavement meant that the percussive element of the aesthetic had to be expressed in other material ways. Therefore, the tin can, the human body as in the "hambone" and spoons became the material manifestations of the aesthetic. Nowhere in the Americas, whether in the United States or in Brazil, did the African lose the percussive element of the aesthetic although it was tested under suppressive circumstances. (Welsh-Asante 1993, 54)

Before hambone and other dance variations exhibited traits of what is now known as tap, its aim was to mimic the drum through hand clapping, foot stomping, or slapping oneself. Although the source changed, drum rhythm retained an essential position in African cultural practices through body percussion. Drum sounds were shaped not only by a restrictive environment but also by the human body, as African slave's main instrument became their own hands and feet.

Due to a lack of resources, Africans avoided the traditional route of producing music by transmuting their physical bodies into instruments. Materials such as animal skins, gourds, and spare time were not readily available to construct drums like the djembe. Additionally, the art of drum making was severely affected by legal restrictions set in place by a government dependent on slave labor. In order to circumvent these challenges, slaves utilized their own bodies as a percussive substitute. Jazz historian Ted Gioia speaks to this transition in his influential book *The History of Jazz* claiming that,

> Similarly, for the African, virtually every object of day-to-day life could be a source of rhythm, an instrument of percussion. And inspiration for the dance. The tools and implements with which the African subdued the often-hostile surrounding environment may well have been the first sources of instrumental music on our planet. Here we perhaps come to realize the hidden truth in the double meaning of the word "instrument," which signifies both a mechanism for subduing nature and a device for creating sound. (Gioia 1997, 10)

These hardships Gioia references were a catalyst for the ingenious formation of tap dance. However, while hambone served as a subversive means to communicate rhythmically, tap became an overt display of body percussive rhythm.

Tapping into the Source

> *To style is an action, and when one styles one is engaged in creating a relationship. Styling refers to the conscious or subconscious manipulation of language or mannerisms to influence favorably the hearers of a message.* (Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*)

African aesthetic principles of mimicry were more than mere survival tools for African people. This functional act placed rhythm at the center of the community, instead of utilizing it as a one-dimensional aspect of entertainment. This act created a symbiotic relationship between the African drum and dancers within the community. What hambone has done is combine both roles of drummer and dancer together through body

percussion. Kariamu Welsh Asante, author of *The African Aesthetic,* supports this assertion: "It is not a question of having rhythm or not having rhythm but how well does one negotiate rhythm in life and in the artistic expressions of life" (Welsh-Asante 1993, 12). Hambone is proof that percussive instrumentation has persisted throughout the development of Black music. Thus, hambone, mimicry, and circular formation were foundations to the successive art form known as tap dance.

Tap is generally classified as an American dance form of stylized percussive feet movements performed in poly-rhythmic time which are rooted in hambone. Tap's framework is an unusual blending of cultures which is essentially an amalgamation of both European and African artforms. Dance historian Hill explains, "Tap dance is an indigenous American dance genre that evolved over a period of some three hundred years. Initially a fusion of British and West African musical and step dancing traditions in America, tap emerged in the southern United States in the 1700s" (Hill 2009, 3). Through formidable circumstances these contrasting cultures formed an enduring alliance during slavery in rhythm and dance. Thus, the formation of tap dance is a reflection of an environment which blended African ancestry and European culture through the oppressive institutions of slavery and indentured servitude.

Although circumstances differed, both racial groups experienced displacement and were forced to relocate en masse carrying their respective traditions with them to a new land. As early Irish immigrants and African-American communities co-existed, both groups shared cultural customs which centered around dance. "People started leaving long before the Great Famine began in 1845; in the thirty years that preceded it, at least 1

million people left Ireland. Between the start of the famine and 1870, and another 3 million or so emigrated" (Blackwell/Hackney 2015, 160). The resulting cultural influence between Irish emigrants and former African-American slaves extends far beyond mere aesthetics.

Despite America's violent history with slavery, this period birthed a cross-cultural exchange between two adversarial groups. African's bondage to southern plantations collapsed with the arrival of Irish indentured servants to America; eventually these two communities encountered each other in a new home. This tenuous relationship is well documented in Hill's *Tap Dancing America*, explained, "The cultural exchange between first-generation enslaved Africans and indentured Irish continued in the British colonies of the Americas through the late 1600s. On plantations and in the surrounding villages and towns, as white indentured servitude was replaced by African slave labor" (Hill 2003, 5). Amid the collective strife of slavery and indentured servitude, Africans and newfound Irish Americans discovered a new common ground producing competitive dance duels.

This communal innovation opened communication across racial lines at an extremely segregated time. Originally, conventional dances such as the Irish Jig, also known as river-dancing, intersected with the hambone in urban bars and taverns throughout the Northeast. These venues often held duels between Irish and Black dancers and provided a neutral ground for healthy competition despite racial barriers at that time.

This exchange between Irish and African cultures often occurred through competitive dance duels. These dance duels always began with dancers mimicking each

other's move a clear example of the communicative ability of body percussion. At first an opponent creates a percussive step combination, which is to be repeated by their challenger. By mimicking this dance step combo, the challenger proves that they are able to match their opponent's skill level in a blitzing collection of percussive foot movements.

Through mimicry both Irish and African dancers were able to share ideas, rhythms, and customs. One of the earliest recorded challenges took place in 1844 between Black dancer William Henry Lane, known as Master Juba, and Irish dancer John Diamond. Professional dancer and author Mark Knowles recount this confrontation in his book *Tap Roots: The Early History of Tap Dancing*.

> After their amicable split, Barnum had replaced Diamond with a young, unknown Black man named William Henry Lane. The new protégé took the stage name 'Master Juba' and centered his act on imitations of 'all the principal dancers in the United States,' followed by his own style. Diamond was always the last dancer Juba imitated, as the Irish-American was Juba's only real rival. (Knowles 2002, 35)

This rhythmic exchange also proves that percussive communication made an unrealistic notion such as equality a tangible reality. Both groups contributed to tap's development by combining their traditional ceremonial dances of the "jig" and "hambone." The "jig" was a cultural percussive dance Irish-immigrants brought over to this new land. Drums were also an essential element of rhythm for the Irish counterpart, however the main difference between the "jig" and the "hambone" lied in the upright position jig dancers kept. In comparison, hambone performers appeared hunched over keeping their hips bent in order to reach their legs and feet easily.

In America, Irish migrants encountered similar dance characteristics among Black slaves, as both Irish indentured servants and African slaves observed each other's dances in Northern cities. In the Irish tradition, dance competitions were an integral part of cultural identity which utilized body percussion. "Towns would Have dance competitions and wandering dance masters would go from town to town, teaching all the latest dance steps. It was through the influence of these itinerant masters that forms of the jig, reel, hornpie, and polk developed" (Hackney Blackwell 2004, 129). In contrast to Irish transplants, Black slaves used body percussion to replace drums which were legally prohibited during that time period. The comparison leads one to question how this artistic progression was dwarfed by racism?

Ultimately, the formation of tap showcases the African's adaptability is a necessary quality living in the extreme conditions of slavery, which was notably expressed in the mimicry of sound. During the 1800s, interchanging rhythmic ideas also allowed the Irish and African slaves to speak a common rhythmic language. African rhythm still maintained a communicative power in spite of the traumatic experience of slavery. As lauded author and scholar Janheinz Jahn expounds, "The drum language is the immediate and natural reproduction of speech, it is a 'script' intelligible to every trained person, only it is directed not to the eye but to the ear" (Jahn 1961, 188). With so many West African ethnic groups being brought over to the Americas—North and South—the drum rhythms were the most common language among them. This rhythmic language, which governed African communities in America, allowed Africans to convey messages to another community with different values.

Academics such as Linda James Meyers concur with this notion as well. The writer expresses in *The African Aesthetic*, “In my contention though these people could not communicate with the spoken language, it was within the medium of rhythm that they found a commonality that outweighed their differences” (Meyers 1993, 36). This achievement cannot be understated considering the restrictive bondage of slavery, which continued well after the U.S. government established the 13th amendment. This oppressive era affected both the artistic and cultural expressions of African Americans by stifling the communal environment which fostered many Black aesthetic expressions.

Despite these challenges, the adaptability of former slaves became a powerful asset during a historical period defined by racial turmoil. Although racial discrimination created a harsh environment, the tap artform continued to develop across color lines with Irish immigrants in bar saloons in the North. Newly freed African Americans carried the hambone tradition with them to the major Northeastern urban cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. The combinative factors of Black Codes and Irish immigration transmuted the hambone into a choreography of physical competition through mimicry.

Famed American anthropologist and dance educator JoAnn Wheeler Kealiinohomoku’s expert analysis reveals the process which created tap dance. In a report given by Congress on Research in Dance, CORD explains the correlation between these two cultures:

> The Irish jig (a musical and dance form) and West African gioube (sacred and secular stepping dances) mutated into the American jig and juba. These in turn became juxtaposed and fused into a form of dancing called "jigging" which, in the 1800s, was taken up by white and Black minstrel-show dancers who developed tap into a popular nineteenth-century stage entertainment. Early styles of tapping utilized hard-soled shoes, clogs, or hobnailed boots. (Kealiinohomoku 2008, 2)

New styles began to emerge as both populations borrowed dance elements honed from each other. One of the many artistic expressions was a folk styled buck and wing technique, which became a signature tap style. This technique evolved from both hambone performers and Irish cloggers using hard-heeled shoes as percussion instruments. The dancer's heel and toe tap out beats by rhythmically striking the floor, while the upper torso shifts with exaggerated leg and arm movements.

The name "buck" refers to a popular derogatory term attributed to Black male slaves during the nineteenth century. The buck title relates to the practitioners more so than the dance. Ultimately, the style was later popularized by famed tap performers Henry "Master Juba" Lewis and King Rastus Brown, who is also credited with inventing the time step technique. Hill describes this method explicitly detailing that it is "played by patting the hands on the body, juba, the 4/4-time signature of a march, with phrasing that was syncopated, could also be played by the feet. "One form was the paddle-and-roll, one of the earliest of the tap dance rhythms on 4/4 time. The juba rhythm is also related to the time step of tap" (Hill 2009, 16). Much like "patin juba," there is a concentrated focus on polyrhythmic techniques in each tap step. Depending on the style of tap performed, different rhythm patterns may be heard. For instance, the buck triple time step is executed by a shuffle-hop-stomp sequence that has a percussive quality, which could also substitute for an African djembe drum rhythm.

Clearly, the spirit of the African drum is evident through the "buck body," percussive techniques, flat-footed stepping. Buck dancing—characterized as stylized footwork with shuffling—is among the oldest styles of percussive stepping, and dates

back to the plantation era. The utilization of the dancer's entire foot—heel, toe, and ball of foot—permitted variation in sounds. Buck dancers also adopted the immobile torso emphasized in Irish jigging evolving the dance form beyond its oppressive beginnings. The general designation for tap dancing at the turn of the century was `buck". Hill summarizes the history of this term explaining, "Africans used the words po'bockorau as a corruption of the French word boucanier to refer to rowdy sailors, and to the Carolinas, where Africans spoke of the "po buck" jig dancing of unruly Irish immigrants" (Hill 2009, 22). The flatfoot method shares similar traits with buck and wing, except flatfoot tap has a laid-back approach which guides the dancer's movements.

One distinction is that flatfooted tap dancers produce sound without their feet ever leaving the ground, since, instead of stomping, flat-footers slide their feet. This technique not only added variety to tap routines, but also altered the percussive sound produced by the execution of this step. The result is similar to drum brush, which has a number of bristles that fan out on its top.

Yet again, what makes these moves vital the percussive sounds that each dance step produced. The aural effect is similar to the polyrhythmic drum patterns prevalent in West African culture. Those same drum patterns delivered messages between neighboring villages through particular rhythms. In tap, body percussion had once again transmuted into a communicative expression. The same core elements were used as survival techniques during the Middle Passage. Janheinz Jahn points out,

> The Africans, however, did not need an alphabet to convey information; instead they developed the drum language, which is superior to writing for that purpose. It is quicker than any mounted messenger and it can convey its message to a greater number of people at one time than telegraph or

> telephone. Only recently has the wireless come to excel in this respect the language of the drums. (Jahn 1961, 187)

The quick flutter movement of the buck and wing step produces a sound comparable to the dundun drum. The rhythm tempo could increase depending on the exuberance in the instrument's player. This approach is applicable to the buck and wing dance step. Jahn elaborates on this notion explained that,

> The dundun, the commonest type of Yoruba talking drum, with its two membranes, of which one is beaten (referred to by Europeans, because of its appearance, as hour-glass drum) is especially well suited to represent the Yoruba language, because it can reproduce not only all the tones but also all the modulations. (Jahn 1961, 57)

Dancers of this style produced a swishing sound effect that resembled a palm rubbing the skin of a djembe drum. In many ways, the hands and feet have interchanged roles as markers between African slaves and their pre-colonial past. Djembe drumming techniques follow a similar polyrhythmic pattern and tempo as buck and wing dance routines. The African drum rhythmic quality is a reflection of each tap dance style.

A piece entitled "An anthropologist looks at ballet as a form of ethnic dance" written by Dr. Kealiinohomoku, compared the shared properties between the two stating, Similarly, the Africa style of dance that angled and relaxed the torso, centered movement in the hips, and favored flat-footed gliding, dragging, and shuffling steps, melded with the Irish-American style of dance that stiffened the torso, minimalized hip motion, and emphasized dexterous footwork that favored bounding, hopping, and shuffling. Eventually, tap styles grew from the blending of these percussive dance styles and was called "Jigging." This became a popular technique characterized as a bent over body position while the dancers' feet moved in flickers and flares.

The sound effect produced by these percussive dance moves resemble West African drum patterns, which were used to communicate messages and indicate important ceremonies. Authors Marshall and Jean Stearns work to identify characteristics that distinguish the dialect of dance. In the case of tap dance, both authors detail this process well in *Jazz Dance: The Story of American Vernacular Dance*:

> By 1800, 'jigging' became the general term for this new American percussive hybrid that was recognized as a "Black" style of dancing in which the body was bent at the waist and movement was restricted from the waist down; jumping, springing, and winging air steps made it possible the feet. Jigging competitions featuring buck-and-wing dances, shuffling ring dances, and breakdowns abounded on the slave plantations where dancing was encouraged and often enforced. (Stearns 1968, 37)

This was a stark contrast from its predecessors considering fragmentary dance moves were incorporated into one style. Identifying the origin of specific steps became a pointless gesture once African and Irish influences were merged into one dance. Tap was certainly rooted in African percussive sources through hand clapping and foot stomping techniques of hambone and ring shouts. These ritualistic activities often invoked African-American ingenuity in the face of extreme oppression.

British ethnomusicologist, writer, record producer, and historian John Storm Roberts points out that "the African instruments most often used by the greatest number of people in the greatest variety of societies are the human voice and the human hands, used for clapping" (Gioia 1997, 11). Both approaches to music came with the African to America. In order to recreate those drum sounds, dancers had to reference the memory for African ceremony and rhythm.

The body percussive tradition of hambone provided a direct link to African drum rhythms and reveals how creativity and invention were survival tools for African Americans. Eventually, the hambone dance was supplanted by the artform of tap. Hill elaborates more on this process when she states:

> With the knees that lifted the feet and drove them vertically own beneath the hips of the dancers, the buck-and-wing was an evolution of the flat-footed style of jigging—that American percussive hybrid of 1800 that fused African and Irish percussive stepping traditions—in which the body was bent at the waist and movement was restricted to the waist down; the jumping, springing, and winging air steps made it possible for the dancer, upon taking off or landing, to produce a rapid and rhythmic shuffling in the feet. (Hill 2009, 22)

These communicable elements of "jigging" were most likely traits inherited from African talking drum origins. During the course of the 18th century, Black dancers used the percussive elements of tap dance to surreptitiously impart the oral history of ancestors who survived slavery. African slaves transmitted the polyrhythmic patterns of their homeland to southern plantation days by transmuting the talking drum unto the human body. Velma Maia Thomas, author of *No Man Can Hinder Me* creates a clear picture of rhythm's central role during plantation: "With hand clapping, leg slapping, and polyrhythms, slave children made their play songs truly African. The best performers could combine song with clapping, allowing them to keep the beat" (Thomas 2000, 24). The extreme oppression African Americans faced invoked ingenuity in ritualistic activities, which consequently played a significant role in the rhythmic nuances of Black music.

For instance, as African polyrhythm went through a cultural shift during slavery, various cadences, patterns, and rhythms from the Fulani, Chamba, Fon, and many other

ethnic groups were homogenized by the enslavement process. The rhythmic language of these ethnic groups displayed with talking drums, which is evident in the polyrhythmic elements of tap dance. Precolonial African culture was largely based on oral traditions, which utilized drum rhythms; naturally, African-American art forms, such as tap, come from the same lineage. Body percussive techniques reinvigorated this rhythmic language with a renewed sense of purpose as African Americans deviated from the practice of drumming.

Dance styles brought over from Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Angola were considered barbaric by European standards. A clear example of the underlying dynamics, which were in direct opposition to the highly rigid styles of European dances the Agbadza dance performed by the Ewe ethnic group of Ghana. In his book *Agbadza: The Critical Edition*, ethnomusicologist David Locke examines the West African dance and origin revealing, "In Agbadza, Ewe poets sang of battle during a tumultuous era (1600-1900) of migration, conquest, and imperialism, including the trans-Atlantic African slave trade" (Locke 2001). The formation of tap dance was merely evidence of a cultural phenomenon that historical scholar Paul Gilroy expounds upon in his book *The Black Atlantic*:

> They are modern because they have been marked by their hybrid, creole origins in the West, because they have struggled to escape their status as commodities and the position within the cultural industries it specifies, and because they are produced by artists whose understanding of their own position relative to the racial group and of the role of art in mediating individual creativity with social dynamics is shaped by a sense of artistic practice as an autonomous domain either reluctantly or happily divorced from the everyday lifeworld. (Gilroy 1993, 73)

This perspective betrays the presumption that European influence was a dominant force in America's cultural development. Beyond European influence, tap was developed

through formalized events during which slaves served whites. In particular, ballroom culture had a profound effect on the development of tap dance. Anthropologist and African American Studies scholar, John F. Szwed, authored *Afro-American Anthropology: Contemporary Perspective on Theory and Research,* along with Norman Whitten. Szwed's research illustrates how these two cultures merged: "Upon arriving in North America and the West Indies, Africans too were exposed to such European court dances like the quadrille and cotillion, which they adopted by keeping the figures and patterns, but retaining their African rhythms" (Szwed 1970, 32). For instance, clogging came to America from England and melded with forms of jigging and hambone to produce a variety of percussive, fast-stomping, articulate footwork styles.

The main focus is for dancers to create different types of sound using their clog-laden feet alone. Clog dancing competitions were seen as a type of popular sport with lucrative rewards for the victor. During this era, tap dance was valued for technical perfection, lightness and speed, which became the standards of judgment in public challenge dances.

Employment opportunities from factories, along with mass migration of Blacks to northern areas, placed both races in influential positions. In spite of the extreme racial barriers that existed, Black dancers adopted this percussive instrument in dance competitions against white counterparts. By merging this element with African polyrhythms, Black dancers were not only able to mimic rhythmic patterns, but also enhance their performances as well.

As tap evolved, European influence placed a concentrated focus on upright torso position for dancers. This shift in standard was a departure from the bent over style of Black jig dancers. As time progressed, slaves developed dances which mimicked their oppressors. Author, playwright, and director Robert L. Douglas details the early development of African-American dance in his entry from *The African Aesthetic*:

> Early dances such as the cakewalk were plantation dances which mimicked the mannerisms of white slave owners. The cakewalk is a building block for what becomes tap. The uniqueness of African American dancing can be followed historically from early plantation 'cake walk' through vaudeville 'shuffles' and 'tap-dancing' onward to the twenties' 'Charleston' and the 'lindy-hop' to current modes of disco acrobatics or aerobics. (Douglas 1993, 165)

What Douglas exposes is a direct link between African percussive traditions and European influences, both of which created the American artform of tap. As African-American life transitioned away from plantations, certain ceremonies, such as ring shouts became modernized in Black church settings. Nevertheless, in many cases, African Americans were forced to gather in exclusion from mainstream society as a persecuted cohort. Contrarily, the mimicry skills of both White and African Americans helped develop new dance traditions, which mimicked grotesquely stereotypical details through minstrel shows.

Minstrel Shows

> *By 1840, the minstrel show—a Blackface act of songs, fast talking repartee in Negro dialects and shuffle-and-wing tap dancing—became the most popular form of entertainment in the United States.* (Constance Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*)

Throughout the Reconstruction Era, minstrel shows created a formative moment in American history. The minstrel era is an integral component in the story of African

rhythmic language and body percussion. Unfortunately, minstrelsy also transformed this rhythm-based tradition of tap dance into a symbol of oppression. During the 19th century, minstrelsy became a primary source of entertainment for White Americans. These theatrical varieties show exaggerated African physical features and Black "plantation" dialect, which reinforced racist Black stereotypes in society. Minstrelsy combined cultural elements of Irish dance, Ham Bone, and music with African drum rhythms.

This galvanized mixture of African and European dance reflected the rapid change occurring during this period. African Americans were able to repurpose the inheritance of trauma into a dance form that is synonymous with American culture. As scholar and Jazz historian and author of *Jazz: A History*, Frank Tirro explains:

> African dances and performances practices affected white music as perceptibly as white music gradually transformed that of the Blacks. Dena J. Epstein's description of the transitional years would seem to conflict with the more popular views expressed by other scholars, such as Marshall Stearns and Ernest Borneman, for she documents an acculturation process that took place simultaneously in the British and French colonies of North America as well as on the islands and in South America. (Tirro 1977, 41)

Minstrelsy's popularity is largely due to Thomas Dartmouth. In 1828, this character actor, first performed as a character named Jim Crow. Crow was based on a popularized traditional slave song called "Jump Jim Crow." Dartmouth included hambone, along with other adapted dance moves in his portrayal of colonial Black life. Tap dance traditions became bastardized for the entertainment of white audiences. Mark Knowles explains this phenomenon in his 2002 book, *Tap Root.* Knowles posits that:

> Irish minstrels first co-opted African dance movements, and then counterfeited them, and that there may have been 'a germ of authenticity' in the reproductions but the movements 'were reinvented out of the social misconceptions about African-Americans of that time, and were presented in overstated, burlesque

> parody with show business in mine as a distortion and a heightening of the various elements within each.' (Knowles 2003, 11)

Irish emigrants, along with other ethnic groups, began to create traveling minstrel shows based on their experiences with Black culture. Authentic negro music and dance were the central elements of minstrel shows and the main reason for its success among white audiences. Contrary to Dartmouth's depiction of plantation life, African slaves traditionally utilized dance as a release from manual labor. This expression was augmented for the stage during the minstrel show boom of the early 19th century. As this era progressed, the theatrical setting helped influence and develop signature moves in tap culture. While interviewing Fayard Nicholas, Hill captures a snapshot of his childhood, as he reminisces on how pervasive Black face was in his time period.

I was in the teens, then, with Darktown Follies, that two streams of musical-theater dancing evolved—one based in Black vernacular dance and Black rhythmic sensibilities, the other in the jig and clog tradition of white Broadway. While the amount of borrowing and imitation was considerable between the two, that distinction (not along racial lines but on rhythmic sensibilities) would pervade the twentieth century (Hill 2009, 49). In spite of racist entertainment purposes, tap dance moves still maintained a percussive quality, implemented as an accompaniment to the music of minstrel shows. As Constance Valis Hill elaborates, "The minstrel show, a Blackface act of songs, fast-talking repartee, and shuffle-and-wing tap dancing, was originally based on the ideas of white men "imitating and caricaturing what they considered to be certain generic characteristics of the Black man's life in America" (Hill 2009, 86). What further

complicates matters were the many disadvantages Blacks endured during the development of tap in minstrel shows.

By distorting the ritualistic purpose of tap, Black stereotypes negatively affected the communicative power of tap. Originally, tap brought disparate communities together; however, minstrelsy disrupted the collective aspects of tap dance, introducing spectators in theatrical settings. Instead of participating in this ritual—as the Irish did— tap dancing became a mockery of Black culture. A disparaging blend of cultural incomprehension and disregard for African artistic expression led to the bastardization of Black culture displayed in minstrelsy. Viewed as an interpretation of Black life, minstrel shows often trivialized Black expression much like the role of the pickaninny. Hill explores this character stating:

> In dance, pickaninnies were talented Black juveniles who danced and sang to provide a backup and a socko finish to a vaudeville act. For the most part, picks were assigned to the chorus as cute, Black 'miniature dancing men,' whose sole function was to enhance, and very rarely interplay with, the white female star. (Hill 2009, 56)

Minstrel troupes composed of Black performers were formed after the Civil War. The Hick and Sawyer Minstrels had both Black managers and performers. James Bland, a Black composer, became a prolific composer who wrote and arranged songs for the Georgia Minstrels. Most importantly, Hick and Sawyer offered an alternative to the minstrel show empire, which embraced a racial rancor that barbarously exploited Black expression for entertainment purposes. In fact, Black minstrel companies, such as Cole and Johnson, began to change viewers perception. Hill elaborates,

> Cole and Johnson decided not to write and perform songs that presented repellent portraits of Black life. There would be no shuffling, no songs in

> syncopated Negro dialect, no condescension to Black folk traditions. Instead, they presented themselves in a quiet and finished manner that was artistic to the minutest detail. (Hill 2009, 43)

Overall, these landmark moments created a seminal period in the evolution of tap dance, which was partly due to the ravenous appetite of an impatient audience hungry for race driven entertainment. White audiences frequently attended minstrel showcases in the pursuit of a purported authentic Negro experience; however, the success and legacy of tap dance had dwarfed the racist implications attached to minstrelsy. Despite the negative stereotype minstrelsy supported, the theater was a creative wellspring for tap dance techniques. These techniques were more diverse than the hambone predecessor and varied from aggressive to the graceful moves of jazz tap.

Jazz Tap: Rhythm for the Reformed African

> *The sense of rapid time in jazz was largely gotten from the way the musician and dancer played with the beat—laying back or playing behind it; dragging out the beat or playing ahead or on top it; or just loading the bar with notes or beats.* (Constance Valis Hill, *Tap Dancing America: A Cultural History*)

From 1850 to 1870, minstrelsy was at its height; however, it lost popularity during WWI. Eventually, entertainment went through a cultural shift when attendance at minstrel shows began to dwindle from the earlier success of vaudeville theater. Black performers featured in minstrel shows sought new work. Since opportunities became scarce, some Black tap dancers became members of jazz bands. Hill describes this transition from tap to jazz dance stating that “one of the earliest forms of jazz dance was tap dance, which was also rooted in both British and West African music and dance traditions” (Hill 2009, 22). The partnership between musician and dancer added a new

percussive element to jazz bands, and what made communication achievable was the cogent parallels between jazz and tap.

In many cases, tap dancers were a significant section of jazz shows and often doubled as drummers within jazz bands. In the tap duo Nicholas Brother's biography, *Brotherhood In Rhythm Brotherhood In Rhythm*, Hill explains the relationship between both roles: "Jazz tap dance developed in direct relationship to jazz music in the twenties, thirties, and forties, sharing rhythmic motifs, polyrhythms, multiple meters, elements of swing (offbeat phrasing and suspension of the beat), and structured improvisation" (Hill 2009, 4). The cultural impact of Jazz tap cannot be understated since jazz provided an alternative approach to tap dance outside of minstrel culture.

From the 1920s to the 1940s, jazz was shaped by various forms of body percussion, such as hand claps and foot stomping. These percussive elements were a communicative bridge between jazz drummers and tap dancers. Conclusively, both roles of dancer and drummer were a continuation of African rhythmic language. Jazz historian Ted Gioia expands on this quality stating:

> Similarly, for the African, virtually every object of day-to-day life could be a source of rhythm, an instrument of percussion. The tools and implements with which the African subdued the often-hostile surrounding environment may well have been the first sources of instrumental music on our planet. Here we perhaps come to realize the hidden truth in the double meaning of the word 'instrument,' which signifies both a mechanism for subduing nature and a device for creating sound. (Gioia 1997, 10)

The African percussive connection Gioia speaks of is most evident with early music bands of America's Jazz Era. Partnerships between dancer and drummer were a likely pairing, considering both artforms evolved alongside each other during this time period.

Naturally, the addition of tap dancers to big band jazz sets was a continuation of the African body, percussive element. To truly understand the connection between jazz and tap dance consideration must be given to each artform's core structure. Both artforms contain short, repetitive, rhythmic features were chords, or melody notes, are embedded. In the case of tap, the polyrhythms tap dancers provided were a perfect complement to the instrumentation in jazz bands. Hill points out the similarities between tap and jazz music:

> There are striking similarities in both jazz and tap's background. Tap dance, developing in direct relationship to jazz music—sharing its rhythmic motifs, polyrhythms, multiple meters, elements of swing, and its structured improvisation—would evolve into one of the earliest forms of jazz dance. (Hill 2009, 12)

Improvisation is an integral principle in African aesthetic culture, and Jazz music has been one of the few artforms which has utilized this quality since its inception. More than a peculiar custom or value, improvisation is a type of unconstrained creation, which depends on numerous parts of melodic experience.

Adopting this improvisational concept requires a different musical approach than European based music offers. Scholar Linda J. Meyers explains how improvisation was incorporated into Jazz music's foundation. In her contribution to Kariamu Welsh-Asante's *The African Aesthetic,* she states, "To fully master improvisation one must be able to adopt a somewhat Afrocentric world view, foreign to the thinking of mainstream Americans and their educational system" (Meyers 1993, 26). This spontaneous authority of jazz imbued a musical identity which embraced African improvisation values. For the

quintessential tap dancer, this enigmatic quality provided an ideal backdrop, as well as rhythmic discourse.

As time passed, African percussive traditions flourished in a different mode. Even with the harsh reality of racial discrimination, it would be hard to overlook the contributions jazz music brought to tap dance. For one, jazz bands provided Black tap dancers a platform to express themselves outside of minstrelsy. This cannot be undervalued since minstrelsy often distorted the communicative power of tap through racist imagery. Comparatively, tap added a visual element to jazz, combining dance and music to create high level entertainment that defined an era.

Even in the jazz epicenter of New Orleans, Louisiana, drum rhythms remained the primary communication tools. The infamous Congo square was a melting pot of Creole, African, and French cultures, which blended musically through ceremonies, such as Mardi Gras. In this ceremonial space, authentic rhythms from Sene-Gambian ethnic groups of West Africa—a major reserve for slave populations—blended with French music to form the foundation for jazz music. Michael Gomez details this process extensively stating,

> The roots of carnivalesque jazz run deep. Most obviously, jazz grew up alongside Mardi Gras, North America's most (in)famous carnival celebration, with its masks and revelry, its drunkenness, carnality, and flaunting of religious and societal norms. Yet while it is easy enough to hear and see a boisterous and earthy spirit in the polyphonic, poly-bodied mayhem of New Orleans street parades, that spirit is often overlooked in most current jazz contexts. (Gomez 2004, 55)

A significant marker for African American's identity is tied to the mass migration from Africa. Coastal slave ports along the Western coast held captives from the Malinke, the Sereer, Fulbe, Soninke.

While on these ports, these nations mixed and created a Sene-Gambian ethnic set. These West African sects of people were generally shipped to sugarcane plantations in Louisiana. Subsequently, this ethnic group created cultural artifacts, such as a distinct Creole language, by infusing the French language with their own native speech. The same link can exist on jazz drum rhythms, which are still relevant in day Louisiana culture. Throughout "Exchanging Countrymarks," Gomez argues that these sorts of retentions are evidence that African-American culture and identity have African roots.

Because of tolerable slave laws, Africans were allowed to retain many cultural practices and musical instruments. The Louisiana landmark, Congo Square was the epicenter for converging genres of music, including African, French, and Caribbean musical influences. As the city of New Orleans grew around it, Congo Square became the center of the French Quarter, birthing jazz music. In both cases, the rhythmic percussion portion bares African roots. Once tap dance and jazz intersected, the two African based artforms became complementary.

Eventually, this music spread throughout the United States and flourished in urban areas. Bars, saloons, and various venues housed entertainment which contained the same energetic performances displayed in Congo Square's apex. As it ultimately turned out, acts, such as the Nicholas Brothers, moved to Harlem from Philadelphia, taking center stage in New York's most popular venues like the Cotton Club. Harold and Fayard Nicholas brought a high level of artistry to the tap dance world using acrobatic and ballet elements. Their dance routines were featured with avant-garde composers, such as Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway's band, and added new life to tap dance artform beyond

minstrelsy. The addition of tap dancers, such as the Nicholas Brothers, was not coincidental. A notable surge of jazz bands occurred in major cities from the 1920s to 40s. Most of this was attributed to African Americans migrating out of the oppressive South into the factories of the North. This period of time is often referred to as the Great Migration.

Jazz bands in St. Louis, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York, were major metropolitan areas which experienced a wellspring of live entertainment venues. Throughout this period, also known as the Harlem Renaissance, rhythmic skills of dancers and bands—specifically drummers—were honed together on stage. Non-verbal communication occurred daily between the body percussive routines of tap dancers and solos from drummers, and Hill exposes this connection stating,

Setting itself apart from all earlier forms of tap dance, jazz tap dance matched its speed to that of jazz music, often doubling it. Here was an extremely rapid yet subtle form of drum dancing that demanded the dancer's center to be lifted, with the weight balanced between the balls and heels of both feet (Hill 2009, 25). Signal cues, breaks, and pauses in the rhythmic language of jazz produced percussive instrumentation for tap performers.

These elements also influenced the rhythmic patterns of tap since both dancer and drummer were rhythmically reliant on each other. As the tempo and cadence of jazz rhythms progressed, so did the percussive steps in tap. The similarities between tap dancers and jazz drummers sustain a relationship which existed between African communities prior to the slave trade.

Jazz historian David Ake details how symbiotic the two roles were at a certain time. “Many jazz professionals in the middle decades of the last century had honed their skills playing for dancers, which generally requires a steady pulse and tempo” (Ake 2010, 19).

The influence each genre had on the other was obviously present with daily practices. Jazz music evolved and became more sophisticated in the late 1940s. Jazz developed various sub-genres, and one in particular was bebop. Bebop jazz songs were characterized by complex chord progressions and faster tempos. Hill describes how tap dancers adjusted to the intricate jazz rhythms at the time: “As jazz rhythms became more complex, more rhythmically swinging, a new type of dancer began to appear on stage, such as Clarence ‘Buddy’ Bradley; he could translate the resources of jazz music from the feet up through the body to open up ever new possibilities for expressiveness” (Hill 2009, 77). In fact, many hand slap techniques, which developed with djembe drumming, are emulated through the body percussion of tap dancers.

Once the 1950s came in, the connection between tap dance and minstrelsy caused mixed feelings between the Black community. Once big bands disappeared from the jazz scene, tap dancers faded from prominent positions in Black music. However, the 1970s brought about a revival period in tap dance, due to young theatre dancers from New York seeking out elder tap masters, such as Charles Honi Coles, Harold Cromer, and “Baby” Laurence Jackson to teach them how to dance.

Tap historian Sally Sommers was one of the first to attend the “Tap Happenings” weekly jam sessions during the 1970s, which became a training ground for young dancers

to learn from old tap masters. Sommers describes the sessions stating, “The African-American aesthetic fit the postmodern dance taste: it was a minimalist art that fused musician and dancer; it celebrated pedestrian movement and improvisation; its art seemed casual and democratic; and tap could be performed in any venue, from the street to the stage (Sommer 1992, 36).

In a formative moment in American history, the same African rhythms, which were implemented into the hambone dance, were now transmuted into modern tap dance to continue a body percussive tradition. The ascent of Gregory Hines during the 1980s reshaped the mold of tap dance. Hines created an elaborate style, which changed the public perception of a tap-artist from a performer to a genuine craftsman. By studying greats like the Nicholas Brothers, he converted the same energy into a distinguished Broadway career which culminated in a Tony award in George C. Wolfe's musical tribute “Jelly's Last Jam.”

Savion Glover, mentored by tap legend Gregory Hines, has kept tap alive with his Tony award winning 1996 Broadway musical revue “Bring in ‘da Noise Bring in ‘da Funk.” This is a clear display of the communicative power of tap that evolved from the jazz tap era. Glover choreographed each piece by finding rhythms and new sounds at different points on the stage.

In this instance, Glover used tap dance as a tool for oral history. Glover—who choreographed the performance—used tap rhythms as an instrument for telling the story of Black history from slavery to the present. When theatre critic John Lahr interviewed Glover for his book *Light Fantastic: Adventures in Theatre*, the dancer explained, “I'm

feelin' the stage for sounds. You might find a spot on it that gives you that bass; you might find a spot on the floor that gives you that dead type tom-tom sound" (Glover 1996, 45). This same percussive method was used by tap-dancer generations before Glover. Hill describes a similar hoofing used by acts such as The Nicholas Brothers called hoofing, "This 'hoofing' combination, with its close-to-the -floor and flat-footed rubs and digs, paddle-and-rolls, and chugging, sliding, and shuffling steps, recalls the early buck style of tap dancing" (Hill 2009, 104). Both Hines and Glover are living extensions of the African drum, having re-invigorated the once moribund state of tap dance. Together, their efforts cultivated optimism for the future of this art form

Despite the abuse of slavery, the drum will be forever an essential element of rhythm within African tradition. However, body percussive artforms like tap have transmuted the drum to fill an expansive space once occupied by the drum. A radical solution grew into a rhythm that shifted Black music.

CHAPTER V

A DISSECTION OF SCAT

> *"When these guys started playing, no one could understand it!"* (Marc Meyers, *Why Jazz Happened*)

Scat is a vocal Jazz technique, which is generally improvised fusing free melodic structure, while using percussive syllables. As an accomplished author, guest conductor, clinician, and scat performer throughout the world, Bob Stoloff classifies scat by explaining, "Scat singing is the vocalization of sounds and syllables that are musical but have no literal translation" (Stoloff 1998, 6). While the untrained ear may simply hear noise percussive sounds like "bob," "beep," "ski," and "do," these terms serve more as musical notes instead of words. Considering the African roots of jazz music, there is an apparent connection between scat and African vocal methods.

In many West African cultures, drum rhythms are translated into vocal melodies with specific syllabic meanings. Comparatively, syllable choice is also a key component in the scat artform. Although scat and traditional African vocalization seem far removed by time and location, both vocal methods use the same muscles groups to produce sound. West African percussive traits are fundamentally tied to the structure of scatting as a rhythmic language. Coincidentally, these similarities in technique expose the cultural bridge which existed between scat and syllabic African vocals. The ultimate aim in scatting is to replicate instruments through vocal manipulation.

Jazz music has maintained this tradition through the practice of scatting. Although jazz slightly deviates from vocalizing syllables in folk music, the purpose of communication is fulfilled. There is no direct translation for scat vocals and that is partially because scat—like other African-based music—is improvised. This extemporaneous medium can relay subtle messages through song and melody manipulation. Scat and improvisation intersect through altered rhythms, lyrics, and tones to reproduce musical instruments. Intuition is a primary attribute of improvisation which allows a singer to bend the lyrics and melody of a song to the performer's will.

Ethnomusicology professor Eric Charry has a distinct view on improvising in West African music and jazz and has become an authority of this West African music highlighting the rhythmic similarities between scat and Mande music. The resemblance between the two are most evident in the vocal phrasings that are prevalent in each style of music. The Mande people are widely dispersed throughout West Africa, especially Mali, Guinea, and Gambia, which were also primary locations for human labor during the Atlantic Slave trade. It is quite feasible that in the creation of scat, African-American descendants of these West African areas instinctively used linguistics comparable to their native language. In an interview with music site Afropop Worldwide Charry concludes,

> Traditionally, throughout much of Africa, a lot of the single-line, melodic improvisation starts up high and then descends down low. It's often believed to reflect the way tonal languages work. In tonal languages in Africa, they start up high and then gradually, at the end of a sentence or a few sentences, end up at a much lower pitch. (Eyre 2005)

In the context of jazz, scat syllables are constructed to impersonate music instruments, which inversely impacts a jazz singer's pitch articulation, pattern, and

resonance. As jazz music advanced into more complex rhythmic structures, scat grew from a spontaneous act of expression, to an actual artform for jazz vocalists, which requires practitioners remove pronounced words and focus on melody, sound, and tone. In an article entitled "Scat Syllables and Markedness Theory," professor of Linguistic Anthropologist Patricia Shaw compares scat to the traditional human language stating.

"Like the majority of human languages in the world, which evolved and persist as strictly oral traditions, scat emerged in the realm of musical genres as a vibrant, expressive, and exclusively oral idiom" (Shaw 2008, 145). Although scat is defined as nonsensical these same vocal elements are found in most human languages. Unlike human dialects, scat idioms carry no literal meaning. Nonetheless, this factor does not constitute the authority of rhythmic language. Scat, along with other body percussion methods, challenge the theory that language must be of a linguistic tradition. In fact, there is ample evidence of rhythmic language in many West African traditions.

One could reason that scatting was cultivated in the United States, although compelling evidence links scat to African roots. Scat's interpretability is linked to the rhythmic drum patterns present in most West African traditions. For example, sans a traditional drum the staccato rhythm of the Malinke warrior dance *dununba* can be mimicked through body percussive hambone techniques or scat phrasing. Scatting also contains the same vocal patterns of various West and Central African dialects; of the Bantu language family, which contains ethnic groups such as the Fulani, Akan, Mandinka, and Ewe. Many of these ethnic groups originated from the Sene-Gambia area of Africa, which was a reserve for slave plantations throughout the United States. While

cohabitating on slave ships and plantations, many ethnic group's language patterns merged with European dialects, most notably occurring with Creole dialects of Louisiana. Louisiana was also home to slaves of the Bambara, Fulani, and Wolof ethnic groups all of whom share lineage with the Bantu language.

Scat rhythmic patterns contain a speech element called fricatives, which are prevalent among Bantu and Niger-Congo based languages. These fricatives are produced by forcing air through a narrow channel made by placing the lower lip against the upper teeth, or the back of the tongue against the rough of the mouth. Armstrong's scat solo on "Hotter Than Hot" is not only a communicative exchange between he and banjo player, Johnny St. Cyr, it shares fricative phrasing that is closely related to Bantu based languages. In an article entitled "Scat Singing: A Timbral and Phonemic Analysis," composer and musicologist professor Dr. William R. Bauer is careful to point out detailed steps for creating scat vocals: "Voiced sounds, which include all vowels, are produced by sending air through the vocal cord. At the voice source these sounds are often complex (i.e., they contain a large number of partials), depending on their pitch and intensity" (Brauer 2001, 304). Jazz music functions as the bridge which merges the nuances of language with rhythm.

In relation to jazz vocalization, scatting consolidates basic linguistic elements into a rhythmic language which can effectively communicate messages through music. In order to properly communicate scat, the manipulation of sound must be mastered. This rhythmic language is often developed by a process of mimicking other sounds or instruments. In fact, many scat vocalists imitate instrument sounds or consider the

phrasing which particular instrumentalists would use. Conversely, scat is not exclusive to imitation of musical instruments. Scat singers often use syllabic techniques when playing the human voice as an instrument. In this case scat does not necessarily need to sound like a particular instrument. Variables, such as volume, tone, and pitch enhance the rhythmic syllables associated with scat. The time and space between phrasing can add a dramatic effect to a vocalist's performance and was an essential technique for jazz vocalists. This rhythmic factor makes it possible to create intricate vocal phrasings in scat performance.

The following scat vocalist: Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Miriam Makeba and Bobby McFerrin, will be analyzed in this chapter for the African retentions evident in their vocal technique, creativity, and overall influence in scat: This list spans several decades and communities across the African Diaspora, which also speaks to the wide range of influence African based percussive rhythms have in Black music.

Satchmo

> *As in Louis Armstrong's scat solo on "Heebie Jeebies." The freshness or return of certain syllables draws attention to such elements as the recurrent harmonic cycle, elements that give the solo its large-dimension shape.*
> (William R. Bauer, *Scat Singing: A Timbral and Phonemic Analysis*)

Trumpet player Louis Armstrong shifted jazz into a new direction, which is epitomized in the song entitled "Heebie Jeebies." According to Armstrong, when he was recording "Heebie Jeebies"—soon to be a national bestseller—with his band, The Hot Five, his music sheet fell to the ground. Not knowing the lyrics to the song, he invented a

gibberish melody to fill time, expecting the cut to be thrown out in the end. In an improvisational fervor, Armstrong continued the rhythm by emphasizing the beat. The truly amazing part is that Armstrong was able to keep right in time with the rest of the band. The improvised rendition wound up being the official single and leaving an influential impact on jazz music. Although Armstrong was not the first scat performer, his success popularized the technique to a broader audience.

Armstrong's method of accompanying his horn section with scat vocals, became a standard for future jazz vocalists and musicians. Interestingly enough, Armstrong was not any more innovative than scat's progenitors. Scat's origin is primarily associated with Louis Armstrong, however legendary jazz pianist Jelly Roll Morton has stated differently. In a transcription of a conversation between ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax and Morton was adamant in the correct credit to scat claiming:

> By the way, scat is something that a lot of people don't understand, and they begin to believe that the first scat numbers was ever done, was done by one of my hometown boys, Louie Armstrong. But I must take the credit away, since I know better. Tony Jackson and myself were using scat for novelty back in 1906 and 1907 when Louis Armstrong was still in the orphans' home. (Hill 2009, 36)

Born in New Orleans in 1876, Jackson played in bars, brothels, and saloons, scatting in between song lyrics to entertain crowds. Yet Jackson died in 1921, when recording music to vinyl was still relatively unusual, preventing his music from becoming well known. The first recorded scat vocal was attributed to Don Redman, on "My Papa Doesn't Two Time" in early 1924. The recording single gained popularity, but Redman focus shifted to writing musical arrangements for other jazz bands once he was hired by

Fletcher Henderson as a composer and chief music arranger. However, while arranging for Fletcher Henderson, Redman unknowingly collaborated with scat pioneer Louis Armstrong.

The advent of music recordings placed Armstrong in a unique position, since artists such as Jelly Roll Morton and Tony Jackson rarely recorded their performances. The ascent of Armstrong's career aligned with the technological advancement of vinyl records, which allowed listeners to enjoy music from the comfort of their home. What drew audiences into Armstrong's world was his communicative scat expressions displayed in his music.

The infectious rhythms of "Heebie Jebbies" garnered much adulation for trumpet player Louis Armstrong. The song's most distinctive quality was Armstrong's scat solo which improvised vocal lines into rhythmic syllables with no literal meaning. Despite its accidental happenstance, Armstrong's improvisational skills changed the course of singing for jazz vocalists. Through Armstrong's solo vocal performance, jazz audiences abroad were introduced to the vocal phrasings which would become known as scat. Jazz critic, music historian, and author of *The History of Jazz* Ted Goia contends, "Armstrong's novel use of scat singing, as a technique helped generate sales, and initiated a practice that, to this day, remains a core technique for jazz vocalists" (Gioia 1997, 62). What initially attracted listeners to Armstrong's "Heebie Jeebies," was the rhythmic interpretation of jazz instruments through the human voice, and Armstrong could play musical notes with his mouth, without using words.

Outside of monumental sales, the "Heebie Jeebies" success, brought the vocal style of scat onto new ground by displaying the human voice as an instrument. Jazz educator Dr. William Fowler details scat's ascent stating, "Scat singing became a form of creative expression in jazz, but the singing, too, was different— more rhythmic and hard-edged than the prevailing gentle and mellow crooning of the time" (Fowler 1996, 38). The popularity influenced Armstrong's peers as scat became an integral part of many jazz performers careers; namely Cab Calloway, Leo Watson, and Adelaide Hall.

Although Armstrong's scat was, and at times still is heard as vocal gibberish, it shares a commonality with many African languages. Fricatives are the main similarity between the vocal construction of scat and indigenous languages. The same muscles used to produce fricatives also produce scat. Fricatives can be used in a percussive manner especially when imitating drum rhythms. Perhaps Louis Armstrong is a descendant of The Bantu speaking tribes using the same innate linguistic tools to produce scat vocals. When scat vocals blend with accompanying instruments the result can be polyrhythmic.

Another African retention which sustained the tradition of scat was call and response. Oftentimes the scat performer would trade rhythms imitating the horn and rhythm sections. This tradition developed with future vocal performers who not only communicated with other band members but also members of the audience with repetitive call and response chants.

Armstrong would often scat phrases in a call and response segment of his show. Successors such as Cab Calloway would even adopt this call and response method making it a staple feature on his show sets. This call and response method was especially

prominent during jazz's swing era, and much like scat the practice is an African retention which endured slavery. Ultimately, Armstrong's African-rooted vocal approach shaped the musical direction of early jazz.

The introduction of scat changed song structure for jazz music. Amid the 1930s, songs were developed using groups of at least twenty musicians. This large music collective was then divided into orchestral sections of instrument players. Typically, song arrangements for swing bands, consisted of an intro, chorus, verse, and solo performances for each music selection. However, after the popularity of Armstrong's single, jazz melodies were structured with an alternative scat solo section. Scat performances shared a human quality through call and response, which garnered positive crowd reactions. Scat solos also provided a break for band members while jazz vocalists received an opportunity to entertain audiences showcasing their rhythmic vocal skills. These music breaks enabled the audience to recognize distinctive segments of the song, and also provided vocalists a solo.

In 1927, Armstrong released "Hotter Than That," on which he sings scat notes on the off-beats as opposed to the normal expected beats. The resulting syncopation adds a polyrhythmic element to the musical composition, which is present throughout most African-based music. Louis Armstrong's scat performance showcased the communicative power between himself and his band. The drums lower in volume giving Armstrong space to create this vocal percussion solo. When Armstrong sings, "boh-bow boh-bow be-bow doh-dow" he complements the rhythm played by the Hot Five. The chant gets repeated back and forth between Armstrong's scat commands and musical responses

from his band in an exchange that resembled African rooted rituals. These African cultural retentions appeared in slave work songs, spirituals, and field hollers. Accomplished trombone player and jazz historian James Lincoln Collier elucidates,

> As we remember from the history of jazz, call and response is a characteristic aspect of African folk music. African slaves incorporated this tradition in work songs and field cries. Usage of a call and response in African religious ceremonies in Africa transformed into spirituals and gospels in new African American churches. (Collier 1978, 96)

The call and response practice erased any separation between performer and audience. This element was prevalent throughout the early jazz period cementing the communal relationship with the audience. Eventually, scat developed beyond its swing era origins, and was adopted by the forthcoming Bebop generation. Scat remained a vital artform, however jazz as a genre went through a severe musical change. Bebop developed in after hour clubs where big band musicians would participate in jam sessions. Because these jam sessions catered more to artistic expression than entertainment, there was an absence of music structure related to bebop since musicians mainly improvised rhythmic melodies. Another noticeable difference between these two styles of jazz was that bebop bands were significantly smaller. A bebop band consisted of a three to five -piece band, which dramatically changed the sound. There was more freedom for solos and sustained upbeat rhythm in bebop jam sessions. This sparse sound bed was a perfect foundation for scat vocalist to flourish.

Surprisingly, scat's pioneering artist, Louis Armstrong notoriously disparaged against this evolution in jazz critiquing the lack of melody and rhythm. "All them weird chords which don't mean a thing…you got no melody to remember, and no beat to dance

to," Armstrong complained to London's *Colliers Magazine*. To Armstrong's chagrin, bebop not only survived, but also revolutionized scat vocals and ultimately the sound of jazz. One of the voices that stood out most prominent figures in this new bebop era was Jazz vocalist Ella Fitzgerald, one of Armstrong's most promising pupils.

The Queen of Jazz

Early scat vocal pioneers, like Armstrong, served as a model for future practitioners of jazz scat. In particular, Armstrong played a significant role in the career of Ella Fitzgerald. Ella Fitzgerald brought this technique to a truly virtuosic level during her career prime from the 1940s to the late 1960s.

Orphaned at the age of fifteen, Virginia born Fitzgerald had a rough upbringing in Yonkers, NY, but was also adjacent to Harlem during jazz's apex as dance music. As a teenager, Fitzgerald would perform on street corners for change developing a natural born talent to sing. She sharpened her performance skills by mimicking well-known jazz vocalists. Eventually Fitzgerald developed a scat routine impersonating her idol, Louis Armstrong. Fitzgerald paid close attention to Armstrong's tone of voice but, more importantly, his use of polyrhythmic patterns. Considering her voice was naturally higher than Armstrong's, Fitzgerald focused her energies on mimicking the scat vocables he popularized. The polyrhythmic tradition Fitzgerald and Armstrong displayed in their scat vocals has an extensive history. Through observing and studying the music of Armstrong, Fitzgerald was able to take her performance to new heights. After winning an amateur night competition at the Apollo, Fitzgerald scored a position singing in jazz great Chick Webb's—who becomes her mentor— orchestra of the Savoy Ball Room.

The next phase of Fitzgerald's career led to her collaborating with bebop pioneer Dizzy Gillespie, which resulted in an evolution in scatting techniques. During the 1940s, the bebop jazz revolution was led by a virtuosic alto saxophonist named Charlie "Bird" Parker; jazz band leader, trumpeter, and composer, John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie; and eccentric pianist, Thelonious Monk. She worked with Dizzy Gillespie, one of the creators of bebop style, and spent much time in after-hours jam sessions, "absorbing" the music played by the pioneers of bebop. Bebop stretched the spontaneous authority of jazz by speeding up the tempo and creating musical arrangements more intricate than the previous generation of jazz swing artists.

To her advantage, Fitzgerald's career progressed in both the swing and bebop eras of jazz. Even though there were many singers before Ella Fitzgerald who recorded scat numbers, she was the most successful recording artist to make a transition from swing to bebop music. The importance of this achievement cannot be understated when one considers the sonic differences between swing and bebop jazz. Author and jazz critic explained the difference between the two styles stating, "Rhythmically, it broke free from the four- and eight-bar boxes within which bebop improvisers had contained their solos..." (Nicholson 93). The recording of "Flying Home" was the first to mark her transition to bebop. Fitzgerald was able to take her previous experience in Webb's swing band and adapt to the complexity of bebop when she toured with Gillespie during the 1940s.

Fitzgerald's scat technique was based on her syllabic approach to scat singing. Her phrasing, and articulation of instrumentalists is based on syllables that start with /n/

and /d/. Fitzgerald's approach to scat diverged from her idol Louis Armstrong's version of the rhythmic language, since she essentially developed her own vocabulary. In the biography *Ella Fitzgerald: Seven Decades of Commentary* by Leslie Grouse, jazz writer Dom Cerulli commented on Fitzgerald's method citing, "There are many times when she will take a word like in and sing it 'i-hin;' or and will emerge as 'a-ha-hand;' and she will have improvised within the word or a vowel, in the chord, and with the mannerisms of a tenor" (Grouse 1998, 42). This characteristic was a major factor in terms of Fitzgerald melodic, harmonic, and syllabic content.

While on tour with Gillepsie, she remained unfazed by tempo and arrangement changes, and complemented the band by emulating the rhythmic patterns played by the horn section. Fitzgerald became known for her impeccable tone, phrasing, and intonations especially while performing songs such as "Flying Home." On the song Fitzgerald collaborated with Gillespie and Parker and brought horn-like improvisational ability, particularly in her scat singing. When the song begins, Fitzgerald sings "bah, di, bah, di dah," transforming the intro into an impromptu scat solo.

In his thesis, *Ella Fitzgerald: Syllabic Choice In Scat Singing And Her Timbral Syllabic Development Between 1944 and 1947,* Justin Garrett Binek, examines the extent of Fitzgerald's vocabulary, "An analysis of these solos shows that the most common scat syllables are: Ah, Ba, Bi, Bop, Bu, Da, Dat, Di, Dl, Dn, Do, Dow, Du, Ee, Oo, Wa, and Ya; they are used in interchangeable combinations with each other" (Binek 2001, 6). Although these syllabic terms are evidence of Fitzgerald's authenticity, at the core her

syllables mimic the rhythm of a tenor sax. This form of mimicry has long been an African characteristic passed down to generations in spite of slavery's hindrance.

Through the act of mimicry, Fitzgerald was able to master Armstrong's nuances while impersonating the trumpeter in her street performer days. However, there is a distinct difference between Fitzgerald and Armstrong's method for scatting. For one, Armstrong's gravelly voice added extra elements to his scat performance. Armstrong's rhythm was also noticeably different because of the swing jazz sonic backdrop for his scat lyrics. Fitzgerald—a successor of Armstrong—naturally maintained a higher pitch with her scat performances. Additionally, Fitzgerald possessed a profound communicative ability through scat's rhythmic language. Her vocal interactions were a musical conversation with supporting instrumentalists.

Syllabic choice was tremendously important to Ella Fitzgerald's improvisational style. As Fitzgerald became more and more immersed in bebop style, she found it necessary to revise the way in which she articulated the attack points of notes. During her bebop stage she often replicated horn instruments through percussive syllables. Harmonically Fitzgerald utilizes "ghost notes"—pitches that are more inferred than they are tonal. As far as her musical, Fitzgerald sings background fills behind the melody. This approach creates a polyrhythmic effect for Fitzgerald's performances. Amazingly enough, the methods Fitzgerald used were mostly improvised. Improvisation has no time restraints and is not limited to the genre of jazz music, since most African musical genres include some variance of this element. African drummer Abraham Adzenyah concentrates in the music of Ghana, the Fanti, Volta, Ashanti, Northern Ghana, Ga,

Yoruba, and Ijo music of Nigeria. In an interview on improvisation, Adzenyah explains the importance of improvisation stating, The African Americans were brought into another world, with a new environment, where they were denied even their own language. If people realized that two of us could speak the same language, they would separate us. You go somewhere else, so that we cannot communicate with one another.

According to Adzenyah's philosophy, it is plausible that scat also serves as a codified language spoken through jazz rhythm. Firstly, scat does not require a literal translation in order to be actual language. In West African societies, drum rhythms were used to signify battle formations, religious ceremonies, and cultural celebrations, and although these rhythms cannot be transcribed, there is a clear directive associated with each of them. Once listeners—who are of the same cultural community—hear these rhythms, there is a ritual dance movement that follows. Quite naturally, scat vocables can also have percussive qualities which resemble African drum rhythms. Scat syllables create vocal sounds which emulate instruments; in Fitzgerald's case this primarily meant the horn section. Additionally, this language is a communication device between performer, band, and audience.

A clear example of how scat functions as a rhythmic language is through the act of call and response. During her performance sets Fitzgerald used scat polyrhythms to engage audiences with call and response. This is a significant technique Fitzgerald learned from not only her mentor Armstrong, but also from her years as a vocalist for Chick Webb's band. The call and response method is a clear example of African retention functioning in African-American culture.

An interview with famed African drummer Kwaku Kwaakye Obeng, confirms the cultural link between African drum and scat jazz vocals. Obeng is also a drummer from Ghana immersed in the modern New York jazz scene, and also selected as a Royal Court Drummer for the high chief of the Aburi Akuapim area in Eastern Ghana. His view on improvising offers a different perspective: "Even those who don't play drums, those who play saxophone and keyboards and those kinds of things, they also heard drums. And they also experienced the tradition of Africa, which is always drums, dancing, organization and group call-and-response."

There exists a litany of performances which showcase Fitzgerald's ability to use call and response in conjunction with scatting. Fitzgerald's most heralded improvised performance occurred during a 1960 live recording in Berlin of a song entitled 'Mack The Knife' from the album *Ella in Berlin*. The defining moment is when Fitzgerald forgets the lyrics and improvises in scat to substitute words. One minute into the song Fitzgerald sings, "We've made a wreck of Mack the Knife!" "You won't recognize it!" She continues to scat, turning the song into a new composition. The following lyrics were created by Fitzgerald spontaneously.

Oh what's the next chorus, to this song, now
This is the one, now I don't know
But it was a swinging tune and it's a hit tune
So we tried to do Mack the Knife
Ah, Louis Miller, oh, something about cash
Yeah, Miller, he was spending that trash
And Macheath dear, he spends like a sailor
Tell me, tell me, tell me could that boy do, something rash?
Oh Bobby Darin and Louis Armstrong
They made a record, oh but they did
And now Ella, Ella, and her fellas
We're making a wreck, what a wreck of Mack the Knife (Fitzgerald, 1960)

As a result, Fitzgerald received awards for Best Female Vocal Performance and the Best Vocal Performance at the 3rd Annual Grammy Awards. Fitzgerald's scat development was due in part to the structure of bebop bands. A swing jazz band on average consisted of ten or more members, whose focus was directed more toward the overall musical arrangement. Bebop bands were a departure from the traditional big band formation, using a smaller unit which provided support for a featured soloist. Jazz venues transitioned from dance halls to lounges for bebop bands, and this framework was most suitable for Fitzgerald after her experience as a vocalist for Benny Goodman, Chick Webb, and Count Basie. The communication between the singer and the band was a large act for anyone to encounter. Fitzgerald's singing talents were used to add vocal value to the big band experience often featured during the jazz dance craze. The exposure to rapid horn and drum arrangements became a vital part of her artistic repertoire and strengthened her ability to keep the quick tempo of swing transferred over well in the bebop era. As an expert composer-improviser, Professor William Brauer points out this quality of bebop music stating,

> Bebop's breakneck tempos and complex harmonic language, in addition to its use of richly interactive rhythm section, stemmed from, and in turn spurred, musicians' quest for ever greater extremes of technical virtuosity. It is hardly surprising, then, that vocalist who sought jazz credibility were inspired by the new style to display their improvisational gifts. (Brauer 2002, 309)

Instead of being a mere addition to the band, bebop bands allowed Fitzgerald to be a soloist who doubled as the horn section. This band arrangement favors African percussive traditions—by providing a central position for drum and song. Bristling with invention and lyricism, her technique complemented the band by placing scat vocals

between silent sections of music. These routines highlight Fitzgerald's profound understanding of how scat can be used with bebop jazz.

The best measure of aesthetic variance between Armstrong and Fitzgerald is in their collaboration albums with each other. As a solo artist in the late 1950s, Fitzgerald recorded several albums with Louis Armstrong. The collaboration became a partnership resulting in three official releases, *Ella and Louis (1956) Ella and Louis Again (1957), and Porgy and Bess (1958)* which in 2001 was inducted in the Grammy Hall of Fame. On all three albums the two artists show rhythmic dexterity with their scat performances. Above all, the importance of their collaborative albums was a passing the torch moment for jazz music, since listeners were able to hear scat performed by two different perspectives and voices. In due course jazz audiences witnessed a changing of the guard with jazz vocalist. One voice which broke the mold produced by Armstrong and Fitzgerald was a woman named Sarah Vaughan.

The Divine One

> *Sarah Vaughan constantly soaked up everything she heard. She became arguably the first singer to fully grasp the intricacies of bop, and it would be an influence on her choice of notes throughout her life.* (Scott Yanow 2008)

The accomplishments made by Armstrong and Fitzgerald paved the way for new interpretations of scat, and Sarah Vaughan was able to build upon the foundation that these jazz pioneers set. What set Vaughan apart sonically was her expansive vocal range, which developed playing piano and singing in New Jersey's Mt. Zion Church choir. Vaughan's initial move toward becoming a professional vocalist mirrored her predecessor Fitzgerald by winning amateur night at the Apollo theater. Shortly thereafter achieving

this goal, Vaughan began touring and singing with bandleader Earl Hines. The Earl Hines band was recognized as an incubator for bebop acts such as trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie and saxophonist Charlie "Bird" Parker.

This exposure to bebop pioneers is another similarity Vaughan shares with Fitzgerald. Clearly this had an effect on her rhythmic sensibilities. Using her operatic voice as an instrument, Vaughan was able to sing notes beyond Fitzgerald's vocal range. Vaughan was one of the first artists to integrate 'bop' expressions in her singing, alongside Parker and Gillespie.

In 1944, she was given her debut recording opportunity on the song "I'll Wait and Pray" as a part of Billy Eckstine's band. However, the 1945 recording of "Lover Man," on which she collaborated with Parker and Gillespie introduced Vaughan to bebop harmonics. Dizzy Gillespie, one of the creators of bebop, created a new language of scat singing. This language was strongly connected to specifics of bebop phrasing. From this Vaughan established scatting as an art form for jazz's melodic structure. The 1957 studio album, *Swingin Easy,* includes the song *Shulie Bop*, which is a principle example of scat recording. This song was composed by Vaughan and her first husband, trumpeter George Treadwell, and appears as the first track on this compilation album. Titled after a bop phrasing of the same name, Vaughan scat sings the vast majority of the tune, and introduces each member of her jazz trio as they follow with a solo performance on their instrument.

> In '*The Art of Lyric Improvisation*,' S. J. de Jong examined Sarah Vaughan's vocal approach. Jong explains the dynamic between swing and bebop bands stating, In this small, often trio setting, vocalists had more aural space to explore the placement of lyrics, rhythm, and melody. They were able to augment

> arrangements, not only by adding band riffs, scatting, or adding extra verses to songs, but more creatively, by re-interpreting the lyrics. (Jong 2008, 6)

Vaughan recorded several albums on which she fully demonstrates her scatting skills. One of them is "Sarah Vaughan with Clifford Brown" recorded in 1954. Vaughan blends her vocal aptitude with the melodic nature of bebop with relative ease. Author Robert Cataliotti includes Vaughan as a primary figure in his detailed historical text of Black music from the mid-nineteenth-century to the 1960s *The Songs Became The Stories.*

> Sarah Vaughan's incredible voice coupled with her inspired musicianship made her the perfect vocalist to capture the sophisticated essence of bebop. Her scat singing on tunes like 'Shulie Bop' illustrates the jazz vocalist's conception of the human voice as an instrument that can express meaning in sound. (Cataliotti 2007, 248)

Though there were comparisons to Fitzgerald, Vaughan's improvisatory passion channeled Fitzgerald's spirit without imitating her. Her jazz artistry shines forth with the quality of her vocals on songs such as *I'm Gonna Live Till I Die*. Here Vaughan conjures lavish vocal bloom expressing the beauty and tragedy of life.

Vaughan's vocal stylings are a direct link to this ancestral revelation exposed by Charry. Although much of her musical skill is a result of her training from the Black Baptist church tradition which is also African rooted. In her later years, Vaughan coupled her vocal harmonies with extreme low tones and high yodel-like wails during scat performances. Her expansive vocal range of pitch and tone were ingrained into her bop routines. An overt display of this technique occurred on a 1977 Chicago on air performance spearheaded by Ben Sidran. The show entitled *Dizzy Gillespie's Bebop Reunion*, featured Vaughan, Gillespie, and bebop vocalist Joe Carroll in a scat jam

session. The techniques between all three reach an apex when Vaughan follows Carroll's run with a wailing vocal which resembled phrasing in West African music. African Music professor and author Eric Charry offers an analysis on African language which matches the fluctuation in Vaughan's vocal delivery, In tonal languages in Africa, they start up high and then gradually, at the end of a sentence or a few sentences, end up at a much lower pitch. Throughout Vaughan's career, she created intricate rhythms by introducing fresh vocable throughout her solo performances. Vaughan transformed her complex style by extending her phonemic vocabulary and incorporating intricate sounds consistent with bebop phrasing. Specific vowels happen only in particular sections to create these rhythms. These phrases were often compared to different languages rather than scat performances.

Pitch is a primary characteristic shared between Vaughan's scat performance and certain West African dialects. Through Vaughan's mastery of pitch and tone her scat vocabulary increased significantly. Music specialist S. J. De Jong expounds on this notion stating, "She has amassed a vast repertoire sung in a variety of styles over her forty-year career and has repeated numerous tunes with consistently inventive lyric improvisations." He continues by explaining, "Sarah Vaughan uses various techniques to achieve the desired improvisational results in her performances, including elements of paraphrasing the original melody as well as the use of formulaic improvisational techniques" (Jong 2008, 1). Her advanced harmonic knowledge and skills were attributed to her proficiency on the piano. In regards to scat's linguistic traits, it is also noted that Vaughan's vocal scat patterns resemble Bantu intonation, since tones are distinguished by

their pitch level relative to each other. Vaughan's vocal range was capable of 4 octave range, which is exceptional considering the average for women is 2 to 2.5 octaves. This technique set Vaughan apart from Fitzgerald, placing Vaughan as one of the greatest jazz vocalists. Miriam Makeba, however, is a deliberate example of a jazz vocalist who uses intonation to bridge the linguistic gap between scat and literal language.

Miriam Makeba: Mama Africa

Born Zensi Miriam Makeba on March 4, 1932 in Prospect Township, near Johannesburg, South Africa, to a Xhosa father and a Swazi mother gave the jazz singer a slight advantage in scat vocalizing. Her path seemed inevitable once she starred in an apartheid movie entitled *Come Back, Africa*, and was discovered by folk musician Harry Belafonte. Belafonte recognized Makeba's authentic African vocals which stood out in the jazz world. Makeba sang in her native Xhosa language. Although this differs from the perceived nonsensical meaning of scat, Xhosa shares some characteristics with the jazz vocal artform.

Xhosa—classified as a tonal language— is the first language of South Africa. Intonation in this language uses, emphasis, contrast, and pitch to express linguistic emotion and distinguish words or their inflections. Tsonga is a Bantu language spoken which descends from an estimated 2,500–3,000 years ago (1000 BC to 500 BC). The linguistic link between these dialects lie in the Bantu based ethnic groups involved in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Amongst those ethnic groups were the Fulani, Yoruba, Edo, Nupe and Bakongo which are both bantu-based cultures which brought slaves over to the Americas. The Bantu speaking ethnicity throughout the Niger Congo area of Africa

which covers most of Central and Southern Africa. According to the diagram below, this area would include the ancestors of both Makeba, Vaughan, Gillepsie, and Fitzgerald.

As major contributors of bebop these Bantu speaking descendants have applied the same Bantu vocal techniques to the rhythmic patterns of bebop. Makeba began her career performed *mbube* a South African genre styled on American jazz, gospel, and indigenous music. This genre eventually developed into African jazz or Americanized African music made popular by Makeba and others. Known for having a dynamic vocal range, Makeba was also the most visible Africans in the US; as a result, placed her in the same influential position as Louis Armstrong.

Makeba had vocal similarities with other jazz greats outside of Armstrong. The percussive vocals in Makeba's "Pata Pata" song shares a linguistic kinship with Sarah Vaughan's solo scat performance in Shulie Bop. Makeba's tune "Pata," was initially released in South Africa and is considered to be her most well-known single. Vaughan expanded her phonemic vocabulary to include more idiosyncratic sounds consistent with bebop phrasing. Through her manipulation and elongation, early and delayed entrances she discovered certain vowels occur only in particular passages to generate rhythmic momentum. This effect often produced scat vocals which resemble the Xhosa dialect in Makeba's song. Makeba could sing while making the epiglottal clicks of the Xhosa language.

Drama of Nommo author Paul Carter Harrison provides insight on what links indigenous African languages with the rhythmic nuances of African Americans stating, "The vocal drum sounds are derived from the acoustical intonations and inflections of

African speech: the *ooohs, aaahs, whooooooeeees, and uhm-umm-uhmms* depend on the context for their meaning." He continues on to state,

> As in Black language, musical treatments of spirituals, rhythm 'n' blues, or jazz, make use of changes in tone and intonation, pitch and range, paraphrasing, slurred texts, humming, stomping, hand-clapping, yodeling, and call/response incremental effects that bring communicative harmony to a shared mode of experience. (Harrison 1972, 98)

She got restored consideration in the mid-1980s, after she met Paul Simon and joined Simon's history-production Graceland visit. Makeba is best known for the tunes "Pata," "The Click Song," and "Malaika." Before the end of her career, Makeba had recorded 30 original albums and 19 compilation albums and has collaborated with other musicians on several other projects. Most importantly she continued to influence future jazz scat vocalist, namely Bobby Mcferrin.

Bobby McFerrin: The Sound of a Thousand Voices

McFerrin was born to vocalist parents. His mother, Sara Cooper was a soprano voice teacher and pianist. Robert McFerrin Sr. was a classically trained baritone and was the first African-American male soloist at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. McFerrin grew up improvising melodies to his sister since a toddler and became a professional pianist for 7 years in the early part of his career. Based in San Francisco, McFerrin directed his focus on singing and playing gigs as a jazz vocalist. Scouring late jazz jam sessions, he improved and honed his skill in the traditional bebop lounge band set up which worked for Fitzgerald, Vaughan, and Makeba. His notoriety grew as the young vocalist who could sing anything.

In 1980, John Henriks invited McFerrin to a jam session with his manager, Linda Goldstein. He perfected the ability to sound like several players at once. In 1981, McFerrin was on the Kool Jazz Festival's “art of jazz singing” program. “From that, I recorded my first record and started touring.” A performance at the 1981 Kool Jazz Festival led to a contract with Elektra, and the following year, McFerrin issued his self-titled debut Long Play (LP) album.

In 1982, he released his first album Bobby McFerrin. From this moment he toured with Dizzy Gillespie his goal was to be a solo vocalist by providing his own back up percussion. This is also a key moment in McFerrin’s training. Gillespie is connected to scat greats Vaughan and Fitzgerald. This connection is fruitful in not only McFerrin’s skillset but also for the progression of scat, which McFerrin ushers in. While on tour with Gillespie, McFerrin developed his stage presence and gained valuable lessons from the bebop pioneer. McFerrin often set aside time to include audience members into his rhythmic performance. This act is actually based on the African principle aesthetic function. In the African Diaspora the art of music and dance are a communal experience. The performer is amongst the community making the audience an instrument. In this respect the art is being shared and transforming all parties involved in the experience.

This was also a mindset he continued into his vast career. There is no irony that McFerrin’s skill comes in the form of an accident much like the mechanical mishap which birthed Heebie Jeebies. McFerrin gains the confidence to put scat in the forefront as the main solo mode of instrumentation. His second album entitled *The Voice* displayed totally vocal scatting without any back-up band. McFerrin's approach to singing is his

1984 album *The Voice*, the first solo vocal jazz album recorded with no accompaniment or overdubbing.

Simple Pleasures (1988) includes "Don't Worry be Happy" which won the Grammy award for Song of the Year and Record of the Year. Later in his career, he became a conductor with various orchestras, and also formed Voicestra, a ten-piece vocal percussion ensemble; he was also awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Music from Berklee College of Music. For Voicestra's material, McFerrin researched African music. Eventually the ensemble used no lyrics in its performances and songs, continuing the improved tradition each song was made up on the spot for 1997 Circle Songs.

In a documentary *Beyond Words: Bravo Profile,* McFerrin explained, "This comes from the notion that villages in Africa would get together and the shaman would come up with something to celebrate the birth of a child, and he would give out parts for him to sing. My belief is that different cultures who don't know each other can sing together if someone is there to find the parts for them to sing." When explaining the dilemma of literal translation in his work he reasons, "If I sing a song that says you broke my heart you left me flat, then that's what the songs are about. But if I sing wo ma ma le ki le li, then what is this song about? Then it becomes your song" (Bravo, 2001). This concept speaks to the functionality of song within a West African context.

McFerrin is known for his unique vocal techniques and fluid abrupt shifts in pitch while sustaining a melody with alternating harmonies. His style is an amalgamation of scat singing, polyphonic singing, and improvisational, vocal percussion. McFerrin still performs and records regularly as a solo vocal artist focusing on music that's based on

body percussion. He is widely hailed for his improvised performances functioning as a body percussionist for the duration of the show. McFerrin has a different approach to music believing his work is intrinsically spiritual. In his self-titled documentary, "Beyond Words: Bravo Profile Bobby McFerrin," McFerrin explains what drove him to create. "The voice gets to the soul of a person more than any other instrument. Because it's the voice. It sings talks, it cries, it laughs, it squeals, it barks, it shouts it whispers, there is no other instrument that can do that. We're born with it" (Bravo, 2001).

McFerrin is the living embodiment of body percussion. As a vocalist, McFerrin often switches rapidly between his normal speaking voice and falsetto register along percussive vocals to create both polyphonic and polyrhythmic effects. He makes use of percussive effects created both with his mouth and by tapping on his chest.

In music, polyphony is the way that melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic aspects of a musical composition are combined to shape the overall sound and quality of the work. The music of Aka people (African Pygmies) who live in southwestern Central African Republic and in northern Republic of the Congo are known for yodeling. The people of tropical West Africa traditionally use parallel harmonies out of balance.

CHAPTER VI

BEATBOX: THE FOUNDATION

> *"Hip hop didn't invent anything. It reinvented everything*." (Grandmaster Caz, *Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap*)

Although a crucial component in hip-hop expression, beatboxing, as an art form, preceded hip hop. Beatboxing is part and parcel of a longstanding tradition in Black music of rhythmic communication through body and vocal percussion. The innovative tradition of crafting musical sounds via the mouth, throat, and nose developed with scat vocal techniques, in the jazz era with scat vocal techniques. Scat vocals were reimagined by the hip-hop generation through beatboxing, which is merely an extension of scat vocal techniques. Notably, both vocal methods utilize the physical body—including the mouth—as a musical instrument. Ultimately, beatboxing reflects African cultural retentions, specifically the use of the body and voice to communicate rhythm.

The development of various body percussive artforms, such as beatboxing, was a direct response by enslaved Africans to chattel slavery and to being stripped of the talking drum, their most central form of rhythmic communication. For example, patin juba, a body percussive dance, applied the polyrhythmic patterns of the "talking drums" and would later morph into tap dancing. Characteristics of the talking drum, such as the polyrhythmic patterns, continued to reflect in many forms of Black music, such as religious songs, blues, ragtime, and vaudeville. Ragtime, for example, has a signature

syncopation that has roots in patin juba, as argued by famed screenwriter and music composer Rupert Hughes. In *Ragtime: A Musical and Cultural History*, an exhaustive look at the ragtime genre, Edward Berlin includes an observation from Hugh's on ragtime. He writes, "The negroes call their clog dancing 'ragging,' and the dance the 'rag.' There is a Spanish verb, raer, 'to scrape,' a French naval term ragues, 'scraped,' both doubtless from the Latin rado-and in such direction etymologists may find peace, for the dance is highly shuffling" (Berlin 2016, 86). Often patin juba would be called ragging by local slaves, yet despite the name change ragtime dance developed into the artform of tap during the jazz era of the 1930s - 1950s. In the same time frame scat emerged as a vocal percussive counterpart to singing and involved vocal clicks and rhythms made with non-sensible verbiage. Generations later, these same vocal percussion traits appeared in the beatboxing musical element of hip-hop culture during the 1980s. The relationship between scat and beatboxing is cemented in the artistic expression of vocal percussion.

Both scatting and beatboxing are rooted in mimicry, with some differences in development. Whereas scat rhythms often imitated horn riffs and was born in recording studios and music lounges, beatboxing was birthed from public school students in the Bronx NY beating on lunch tables. In his essay, *From Jimmy Castor to Grandmaster Flash — The Role of Morrisania in Hip-Hop's Evolution*, Mark Naison, a Professor of History and African American Studies at Fordham University in New York City, connects the birth of hip hop to the African-American, Caribbean and Latin styles of music that thrived in South Bronx neighborhoods. Naison elaborates, "Using turntables, records and the human voice to create hypnotic, compulsively danceable rhythms that alternately reflected and transcended the discordant atmosphere they grew up in, they

created a unifying identity for Black and Latino teenagers that lived in neighborhoods that city government had all but abandoned" (Naison 2007, 12). One of the main techniques these youth developed was mimicry.

Specifically, they mimicked the sound effects of a popular production tool called the TR-Roland. Manufactured beat machines like the TR-Roland series, created by Roland company founder Ikutaro Kakehashi in 1980, were pivotal music production tools in early hip hop classics. For example, drum machine's unique synthesized sound was utilized by hip-hop DJ/artist Afrika Bambaataa on his seminal 1982 record Planet Rock. As hip-hop music developed in the Bronx during the early 1980s, young enthusiasts and upstarts similarly vocalized records by sometimes beatboxing the rhythm. For Black and Latino youth specifically, mimicry constituted a radical solution to the socio-economic poverty that inhibited them from buying the beat machine, which had a $1,200 market price. Because of their ability to replicate rhythm beatboxers became essential members of hip-hop groups. The substitution was considered wise since acquiring a beatboxer into a crew was more affordable than spending money on production equipment. The role beatboxers fulfilled within hip-hop groups paralleled the position held by jazz band scat singers in the late 1950s.

Much like a scat vocalist synergistic relationship between themselves and jazz instrumentalists, beatboxing complimented the hip-hop MC. Years after brave jazz pioneers improvised rhythmic percussion on unsuspecting audiences, the seeds of this practice come into bloom through the hip-hop generation. This practice became an identifying characteristic for the Bebop Era in jazz, as artists such as Ella Fitzgerald and

Sara Vaughan created on-the-spot syllabic vocables, which complemented the instrumentalists in the band. Beatboxers also created random yet syncopated rhythms using the same muscles as scat vocalists.

In similar fashion of their enslaved ancestors, Black and Latino youth of the Bronx were figuratively and literally stripped of the drum and left to their own devices to fill that void. The New York fiscal crisis of the 1970s resulted in budget cutbacks for education and removal of art and music programs. These socioeconomic factors were ultimately based on racial oppression and affected musical education minority urban youth. White flight from urban areas to the suburbs (along with foreign outsource manufacturing and New York City's tax debt), caused the city's economy to decline. As a result, over one hundred million dollars was cut from the Board's fiscal year 1976 budget of $2.8 billion. Youth who would've learned drum in an educational setting were forced to translate and recreate drum rhythms through their mouths. Enslaved Africans experienced similar circumstances when the talking drum transformed into a tool of subjugation during the *dancing of slaves*, and once again when plantation owners prohibited its use in fear of uprising, much like with the infamous Stono Rebellion. In both historical cases, the drum lost its centrality in the African community, forcing Africans to substitute drum rhythms with body percussion-rhythms. Hip hop records began to adopt the electronic rhythm machine as a production tool on records like Planet Rock.

In 1982, Afrika Bambataa and the Soulsonic Force released this single which would become one of the most iconic hip hop records of all time. Youth within the hip-hop community not only adopted the record as their own, but also began to mimic the

complex rhythmic pattern with their mouths. This trend of mimicry continued as a radical solution to the socio-economic poverty of young Black and Latino youth through the art of beatboxing.

Born in the cafeterias of the Bronx, NY public school system, beatboxing provided a percussive framework through which rappers could rhyme narrative songs and routines. Youth in the 1970s were denied music courses because of city municipal cuts in education budgets. Additionally, Bronx Public Schools eliminated art programs in hopes of averting a fiscal crisis, ultimately leaving an artistic void which hip hop filled. Professor Mark Naison further explains,

> Worse yet, children growing up in Morrisania were no longer being taught to play musical instruments, since the wonderful music programs that had flourished in the South Bronx's junior high schools, which had nurtured artists like Jimmy Owens, Eddie Palmieri, and Ray Barretto, had all been shut down during the City's Fiscal Crisis. (Naison 2007, 10)

Without the funds to support music programs, Black and Latino youth were robbed of the opportunity of learning to play the drum. Once more, the talking drum was shifted from its centrality in the African community, which subsequently substituted drum rhythms with body percussive rhythms. While this shift was first introduced through slavery, the absence, with kids in the Bronx losing their "drum," manifested through the lack of music programs.

The Human Beatbox

> *"The beatbox is a manually operated drum box that I used to play while I was DJing. It was a machine that was made in England by the VOX company. It had bass, snare, hi hat and handclap keys. I used to play this like a typewriter almost."* **(**Grandmaster Flash aka Joseph Sadler, *The Foundation*)

One of the first DJs to adopt this instrument was Joseph Sadler, aka Grandmaster Flash. Grandmaster Flash was a young electronics whiz, trained at a South Bronx vocational high school, who took the mixing of records to new levels at park jams where he would wire his turntables to streetlights and blast music for block parties. Having purchased a beatbox from his neighbor, who was a drummer, Flash used the drum machine as a way to entertain audiences in between records during his DJ sets.

A neighbor of Sadler's was a drummer who sold him a drum machine for $125.00 Sadler famously coined the phrase beat box but had no idea people were replicating drum machine sounds with their mouths. As explained to hip hop historian Jayquan of The Foundation Hip Hop Society Flash expresses, "So the human beatbox is people emulating something that I created. I just want people to know that" (Grandmaster Flash & The Furious 5 Foundation Lesson #12, 2017). Although beat machines were a rare find in Grandmaster Flash's peak, vocal beatboxing became more popular, to substitute his lack of equipment.

To circumvent the economic burden, young hip hop fans utilized mimicry in order to recreate the rhythmic drum patterns. To the dismay of many upstart DJs in New York's inner city, these drum machines were often too expensive, especially when considering the already hefty financial investment of DJ equipment. However, by 1977, several more models were produced and soon integrated into DJ sets throughout the Bronx. In fact,

many New York DJs careers began with the 1977 New York City Blackout, which allowed many local DJs to expand their equipment by looting. It was quite easy for beatboxers to replicate the signature bass kick drum sound of the Roland TR 808 through their mouths, which they would manipulate. This manipulation and oral practice created the foundation of hip hop, and during the early 1980s, was christened beatboxing.

African Retentions

Despite the difference in music genres, both hip hop-based beatbox and jazz-based scat vocal artists share a commonality in the African linguistic tradition. Performers of both genres use similar vocal components that have roots in Bantu based languages. For example, click rolls, a vocal component shared by the Congolese, Yoruba, and Xhosian languages, is a common technique in beatboxing.

In order for the click roll sound to occur, the tongue moves forward and squeezes air past the tongue tip, creating a repeated click sound effect. This technique is used regularly in Bantu based languages and is detailed in an article entitled *Collected Papers on Bantu Linguistics Tone Ranges in a Two-Tone Language* by Malcolm Guthrie, the late Professor Emeritus of Bantu Languages in the University of London. In this collection, he explains the difference between implosive and explosive consonants, “B, d, g (and gb, kp where they occur) are frequently implosive, but this is not essential, i.e. the implosive and explosive voiced consonants belong to the same phoneme” (Guthrie 1970, 31). Linguistic Professors Paul F. A. Kotey and Haig Der-Houssikian present similar discoveries found in Yoruba dialect. Their study *Language and Linguistic Problems in Africa* highlights, “On the phonological level, Southeast Yoruba dialects preserve the

relic phoneme /y/, a voiced velar fricative which in Northwest Yoruba dialects has changed to /w/ and in Central Yoruba dialects has been eliminated (Kotey and Der-Houssikian 1977, 374)." As noted, this click roll technique is a common linguistic feature in many of the West African languages, which suggests this vocal method may have been a latent ability with African descendent in southern plantations. These African slaves who migrated from these plantations eventually inhabited cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and New Jersey. African linguistic patterns in hip hop beatboxing can also be linked to Bantu based languages. There is evidence of the link in the Northern colloquial vernacular via the Great Migration from 1910 - 1970, during which hundreds of thousands of African Americans migrated to Northern cities, such as Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and New York from Southern cities, such as Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and the Carolinas.

Several Black artists were able to use this linguistic click roll characteristic through their music expression. Notably, this unorthodox singing technique was best executed by the international, South African vocalist and performer, Miriam Makeba, whose 1967 song "Pata Pata" introduced the world to the Xhosa language, which incorporated oral clicking sounds. Similarly, beatbox pioneer Doug E. Fresh used click rolls, for example, on his 1994 single "Freaks," which featured adolescent dancehall artist Lil Vicious, and was solely backed by Fresh's click roll sound effects. Many cultural traits of Bantu based languages appear not only in the linguistic characteristics, but also in the polyrhythmic patterns of Black music. A large majority of Carolina slaves were of the Igbo and Kongo ethnic groups, while Georgian and Alabama slaves were descendants of the Fon. When descendants of these Georgian and Alabama slaves transplanted to

northern cities, it is quite plausible that latent dialects of these African ethnic groups resurfaced in the practice of beatboxing. Historian Boubacar Barry explains a general overview of this theory in *Slavery and African Ethnicities in America*:

> If we look at the changing ethnic composition of slaves exported from various African coasts over time, what we know about the patterns of the transshipment trade of Africans within the Americas, and the distribution of new Africans after their final sale, we can see further evidence of clustering of ethnicities and speakers of mutually intelligible languages on Atlantic slave trade voyages as well as after they arrived at their final destinations. (Barry 2009, 56)

Barry's analysis highlights the catalyst for ethnic blending which occurred during slavery. The Great Migration is a key in unlocking how the linguistic patterns of Bantu based languages appeared in the hip-hop element of beatboxing. As African ethnic groups miscegenated in the American South, they exchanged linguistic patterns and cultural rhythms.

The linguistic patterns were cemented once the African-American ethnic identity was formed, yet within Black vernacular are remnants of Bantu language. The most prominent link between beatboxing and these ethnic groups lies in the fricative consonants that stem from Bantu linguistic patterns and that are used by beatboxers. These fricatives are used to create the mechanical sounds (snare drums, cymbals, and other buzzing noises) that beatboxing emulates.

Linguistic characteristics which were common in the native tongue of many African ethnic groups, permeated the language of southern slaves. In the academic article, "A Social Psychological Approach to Languages of the African Diaspora," authors Afesa M. Bell and Charles Turner point out the linguistic origins of African languages which contain fricatives. They state, "It is important to note, however, that the

original grammar and phonology of Black English was derived from West African languages, and only the lexicon was borrowed from the English language" (Bell and Turner 1980, 480). This shows that linguistic characteristics such as fricatives were and still are prevalent in early African-American culture. More importantly these fricatives are essential for the formation of beatbox rhythms.

Fricatives are generally made by forcing air through a narrow channel of the lower lip against the upper teeth. The resulting sound emulates snare drums, cymbals, and other buzzing noises made with fricatives. In a study entitled *Breaking Down the Beat,* linguists, Reed Blaylock, Nimisha Patil, Timothy Greer, Shrikanth Narayanan, and beatboxer Devon Guinn explain how beatboxers coordinate their lips, tongue, and throat to create a beat and how this compares to human speech:

> Beatboxers have learned to produce a stunning array of sounds that no one ever taught them. Learning to beatbox is like learning a new language, except that there are no words—only sounds. By analyzing the movement patterns beatboxers use, we can better understand how the human body learns and produces coordinated actions. That information tells us more about other behaviors like speech and dancing, and it all comes together to uncover the mysteries of the human mind. (Blaylock, Patil, and Greer 2018, 6)

The Sibling Artforms of Beatbox and Scat

Although beatboxing is intrinsically linked to hip hop, similar vocal traits are reflected in jazz scatting. The social conditions which affect hip hop music, are comparable to those that affect jazz music. When observing the parallels between jazz and hip hop, one must consider that both forms of music were created in urban environments. During the 1920s, jazz music developed in a small area in New Orleans called Congo Square, where musicians and African drummers would congregate and

create improvised rhythms together. Approximately sixty years later, during the late 1970s, hip hop was birthed in a downtrodden metropolitan borough called the Bronx, where summertime park jams would fuse Latino, Reggae, and Soul music rhythms played by DJs equipped with two turntables.

Beatboxing extends from scat much like hip hop is a successor of jazz. Much like how tap evolved from the hambone, beatboxing evolved from scat vocalists. There are many similarities between scatting and beatboxing. Whereas Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, and Sarah Vaughan imitated horn sections and drum solos with great vocal agility, early beatboxers began their craft by emulating rhythm machines and early funk recordings. Hip hop historian and editor of foundationhiphop.com, Jayquan Foster, speaks of this influence, stating that "Early beat boxers would imitate drum breaks in popular songs such as the Roto Tom intro of go-go band trouble funk emulated by Doug E. Fresh in the intro of 'La di da di' or 'BeatBox' on the 'Loose/American Express.'"

Doug E. Fresh: Beatbox Innovator

Known for his energetic live shows, Doug E. Fresh began his career during the early 1980s as a traditional MC/rapper, eventually adding beatboxing into his repertoire as a performer. Fresh's inclusion of beatboxing was a radical act for hip hop audiences and made performances more of an exhibition of skill than an entertaining show. Fresh was even able to bridge jazz and hip hop with his single "Nuthin" off of his 1986 album, *Oh My God*. Over the single, Fresh scats and beatboxes, a process made possible through the technology of multi-track recording.

This is also the same case with Slick Rick and Doug E Fresh's hip hop classic, "La Di Da Di," which was hip hop's first all-vocal record featuring a narrative style rhyme from Slick Rick and a beatbox production by Doug E. Fresh. During the latter section of the song, both Rick and Doug rework "Sukiyaki," a 1981 hit from disco act A Taste of Honey. In this section Doug E. Fresh adjusts his beatboxing rhythm to a percussive reinterpretation of "Sukiyaki" to compliment Slick Rick's off-kilter singing.

One of Doug's most well-known songs, "La Di Da Di," altered the perception of traditional songs in hip hop by pushing the beatboxer into a more central role within many hip-hop groups. This once unorthodox rhythmic beatboxing practice became a necessity throughout the mid 1980s within hip hop crew/bands, creating hip hop group roles to include the MC, DJ, and Beatboxer. Critical acclaim was given to groups such as UTFO Human Beat Box II, Triple Threat Z-3 MCs, Veronica Bad Boys feat. K Love for including beatboxing as a major component of their musical output.

During this era, Doug E. Fresh also released records that were strictly beatbox instrumentation without any lyrics. One such example is the 1984 single on Enjoy Records titled "Just Having Fun," which included a B-Side song called "Bonus Lesson #1." This instrumental song was essentially a beatbox acapella on which Doug E. Fresh emulated popular breakbeats which were b-boy staples. Doug was not only a beatboxer, but also an MC. His performances were more exhibitions of skill, during which he displayed his complex beats and included an arsenal of sounds that involved clicking and placing the mic to his throat for vocal harmonica.

Techniques such as these not only set Doug apart from other beatboxers, it also displayed his ingenuity as a pioneer of the beatboxing craft. During the mid to late 1980s,

beatboxing remained relevant in hip hop. Its success underscored something that was an obvious winning combination. Several other beatboxing practitioners rose to fame during the early 1980s, for their proficiency and distinct vocal percussive style. Eventually rivalries ensued between Doug and several other beatboxers, one being with Darren "Buffy" Robinson of the Fat Boys.

Darren "Buffy" Robinson

One of the first 1980s rap groups to transition to nationwide success was The Fat Boys. Of the three-man group, Darren "Buff the Human Beat Box" Robinson served as a beatboxer, while members Mark "Prince Markie Dee" Morales and Damon "Kool Rock-Ski" Wimbley were the MCs. Buff's ability to use his mouth to recreate hip-hop rhythms and various sound effects proved to be The Fat Boys biggest selling point. Buffy perfected an inhalation beatboxing technique between vocal kicks and snares. The result was a resounding sound effect that became Buffy's signature vocal percussive. Buffy's breathing technique is also close to the linguistic patterns found in South African languages. Robinson's beatboxing technique shares similarities with the vocal arrangements of "Mbube Song."

The heavy inhalation and exhalation present in songs such as The Fat Boys 1984 song "Stick em" expanded this technique into an entire vocal style. Recent studies have shown the connection between South African dialects and various beatboxing techniques. According to Michael Proctor, a linguist and speech scientist at the University of Western Sydney in Australia, "A key finding of our work is to show that we can describe the basic sounds used by the artist with the same system used to describe speech sounds, which

suggests that there is a common inventory of sounds that are drawn upon to create any vocal expression." He continues: "These sounds are very similar to clicks seen in African languages such as Xhosa from South Africa, Khoekhoe from Botswana, and !Xóõ from Namibia, as well as consonants seen in Nuxálk from British Columbia, Chechen from Chechnya and countries in Africa" (Proctor 2013, 8). Beatboxers like Buffy were often back drops for MCs. This is best exemplified on "The Human Beat Box," a single released on Buddah records in 1984, with Buffy on full music production for MC's Prince Markie Dee and Kool Rock Ski. Buffy's strength was the bass in his voice, which resonated equally on recordings and live performances. This inhalation vocal style became popular and won over crowds on national hip hop tours, such as the 1984 and 1985 Fresh Fest Tour.

The examples connecting beatboxing and African dialects are manifold, especially considering the ethnic lineage of African-American hip-hop artists. Although hip hop artists may not have consciously borrowed vocal methods from their African ancestry, they reframed African body percussion to fit into the modern context of beatboxing. Among the many hip hop artists who reimagined this rhythmic language was an individual skilled in beatboxing, rapping, djing, and off kilter singing: Marcel "Biz Markie" Hall.

Biz Markie: Make the Music with Your Mouth

> "*Hip-hop doesn't create renaissance men anymore, but it seems that Biz Markie was truly one of the first multi-faceted rappers to be gifted with varied skill-sets.*" (Wax Poetics)

There are many examples of beatboxer anthems gaining popularity during hip hop's 1980s golden era: Captain Rock's "Cosmic Blast" in 1984 on Nia Records, "Just

Say Stet" in 1985 Wise beatbox Stetsasonic. However, the most influential beatboxer after Doug E Fresh and Buff was Biz Markie.

Marcel "Biz Markie" Hall started as a beatboxer for pioneering female MC, Roxanne Shante in 1986. By then the fledgling hip hop artist had perfected vocal percussion from his pre- teen years. "Beatboxing. I mean, I was a kid and that was just the first thing I took up when it came to hip-hop. I didn't think about it, I just sorta did it, ya know" (Ma, 2014 Wax Poetics). Early in his career, Biz was made a member of the prestigious Juice Crew led by DJ/Producer, Marley Marl. However, what set Biz apart from the aforementioned beatboxers was his ability to rap, sing, and beatbox, using James Brown like wails and screams within one performance. Biz attributed this diversity in style among pioneering beatboxers to the quest for originality: "I just made it up in 1977," he says about learning to beatbox. "I just did beats with my mouth, and people thought I was crazy. I made up my way and Doug E. [Fresh] made up his way and Buffy made up his way. That's why all three of us don't sound like nobody. We didn't want to bite anyone else's style" (qtd. in Nielsen).

Later in his career, Biz Markie became primarily known as an MC (and is now a full time DJ); yet his break in hip hop came as a beatboxer for female MC Roxanne Shante. Initially, Biz Markie's beatboxing style began as an amalgamation of both Doug E. Fresh and Buffy's vocal techniques. Biz's ability to rap, beatbox, and sing gave him the ability to rhythmically communicate with his audience. During his live performances, Biz often improvised a re-interpreted beatbox version of popular Rhythm and Blues (R&B) songs which would induce a call and response chant. In comparison to Doug E.

Fresh and Darren "Buffy" Robinson of The Fat Boys, Biz Markie is, by far, the most interactive with his audience.

Biz's creative technique of beatboxing reflects the African aesthetic improvisational tradition in that many of his percussive rhythms are created spontaneously. In relation to scat, Biz's manifestation may be different, but the energy is the same. Marley enhanced Biz Markie's vocal percussion by adding echo and reverb effects to Biz's vocals. Because of Marley's employment at NY radio station WBLS, his access to advanced recording studio equipment set him far ahead of hip-hop producers at that time. This technique was best displayed in his 1988 single "Nobody Beats the Biz." The chorus, sung by TJ Swan, was modeled after a popular New York City electronics store commercial slogan. During the song's bridge, Biz's beat box is a reverb effect, which gives his vocal performance a sonic quality beyond that of his competition. The years 1987 to 1989 were considered hip hop's Golden Era phase, which introduced the concept of sampling music from the past to create brand new songs. Technology in hip hop production changed from the rhythm box to the sample machines such as the MPC 60 that Marley Marl used. These percussive and technical elements combined to propel Biz Markie's success and career as the most influential beatboxing pioneer of all time.

Generation Now: From Rhazel to Reggie Watts

As a new era of hip hop emerged, modern beatboxers began performing with different instruments to create a completely unique and original sound. Most notably, Rahzel Manely Brown is arguably the first beatboxer to perform as a member of a live band. Rahzel is mainly known as a two-time Grammy Award winning vocal percussionist

and former member of hip-hop band, The Roots. Their music made real inroads with audiences by adroitly mixing jazz and beatboxing. This mixture was exemplified on The Roots 1995 sophomore album *Do You Want More?!!!??!* On a track titled "Lazy Afternoon," Rahzel provides percussion for a carefree jazzy sound bed. This was one of the many songs on this album that consequently bridged the gap between scat and beatboxing.

After his stint with the Roots, Brown embarked on a solo career with the release of his 1999 album *Make the Music 2000*, an obvious ode to his progenitor Biz Markie's 1986 hip hop classic album *Make The Music with Your Mouth Biz*. Rahzel's capacity to re-make songs without instrumentation, sing, provide melody, and rap makes him a formidable live performer who rejected trends in favor of pressing the limits of vocal percussion.

Another new age pioneer carrying on the beatboxing tradition is Reggie Watts. Watts's solo shows consist of him singing, beatboxing, and rapping. Earning a reputation as a one-man band, Watts has received critical acclaim. By programming vocal bass lines into a loop machine, Watts showcases his trademark skill of sampling himself. This rhythmic fusion (another comedic trope inherited from Biz) works best in Watt's music performances, while he's making random sounds and noises, and speaking in other accents and languages. These percussive sounds fall in line with many of scat's improvisational sensibilities.

Not only has Watt's stretched the sonic boundaries of beatboxing with new sounds and techniques, but he has also brought new musical forms to beatboxing, such as drum and bass, and dance music. He has even been able to break new ground as a vocal

percussive band leader and announcer for The Late Late Show with James Corden.

Watt's success is evidence of the various ways beatboxing has permeated popular culture.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this thesis was to highlight how talking drum rhythms transmuted into African body percussion artform. A major contributing factor in the transformation of African rhythmic language was the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, where upon capture enslaved Africans were forced to dance. African ethnic groups (such as the Fon, Yoruba, and Igbo) retained their ability to rhythmically communicate, through using shackles and wood planks as percussive instruments. Eventually, these rhythmic elements evolved into body percussive techniques such as hand claps, foot stomps, and vocal percussion.

A quote which epitomized the advent of body percussion on slave ships, comes from Daniel Black's, *The Coming:* "Someone would beat his planks like a drum and say his own name three times. That was the sign. Then the rest of us would join in, beating our planks with our fists and speaking our mass in succession" (Black 2014, 23).

From the explosive profusion of jazz tap and scat, to the discordant sound of hip hop's beatboxing, body percussion has manifested in several iterations, yet the African origin remains constant. This thesis connects African artistic expression in the face of oppression during the slave era, the jazz era, and the hip-hop era.

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Linguistic African retentions are found in the vocal percussive artforms of scat and beatboxing. Bantu speaking ethnic groups which heavily populated the Senegambian and Central Nigeria both large resources for African slaves who transferred their linguistic characteristics across the Atlantic. Many of these languages, used in these areas contain fricatives and linguistic traits which bears a close resemblance to vocal techniques used scat and beatboxing. Another contributing factor to scat and beat boxings development was the rhythmic language embedded in West African cultures. Author Constance Hill elaborates further on this circumstance: "Because West Africans lacked a common spoken language, music and dance served a crucial role as a medium for conveying the history and values of these people who were captured and brought to the New World" (Hill 2009, 6). In this excerpt, Hill highlights the circumstances which birthed a percussive phenomenon. In support, my research identifies the social factors which link body percussion scat and beatboxing to African linguistics. This information is essential in discovering the subversive ways African characteristics persisted over time.

Considering the cultural impact of jazz and hip-hop music genres, it is plausible African rhythmic language retentions have influenced popular culture at large.

One example would be the step tradition developed in the early 1900s by historically Black colleges across the United States. The percussive dance tradition of stepping is originally linked to Pan-Hellenic African-American fraternities and sororities student organizations at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and started as a celebratory exchange of percussive moves during picnic gatherings.

Stepper's utilize the entire body as an instrument to create complex rhythms through a combination of footsteps, spoken word, and hand claps. This dance tradition has spread globally and has also been emulated by Latino, White, and Asian fraternities and sororities such as Lambda Sigma Upsilon.

Much like the aforementioned example, this thesis is able to track the progression of African body percussion artforms by analyzing the ever-changing social factors which affect the Black aesthetic. From the suppression of the drum on slave plantations which birthed hambone, to the removal of music programs in the disenfranchised South Bronx, body percussion has been deeply impacted by an obstruction of liberty. Despite various forms of oppression, African rhythm has persisted though the living bodies of Africans across the diaspora.

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